‘Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.’

Psalm 100:3
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1. Introduction

This report will elaborate on the content of our Blue Book report, and provide a chance for the young adults of the National Youth Assembly (NYA) family to share the work they’ve been doing throughout the year following the 2018 event.

Led by this year’s Moderator and Clerk, Tamsin Dingwall and Seonaid Knox, the youth reps were split into small groups to tackle each of the main discussion topics that were held during the Assembly. These groups are:

- End of Life Issues
- Being Ecumenical
- Social Media

In addition to further exploring the discussions held at NYA 2018, we will be presenting how we have turned these conversations into action over the year. There will also be an insight into the worship and fellowship at NYA, as well as reflections of the event from some of the delegates and staff, and a look at the General Assembly (GA) experience from a couple of youth reps.

Over the months following NYA our team has accomplished a great deal. It is with pride we can look back at their efforts thus far, the work they have yet to do, and note that all of this has been achieved with passion, enthusiasm and determination. This report highlights that the NYA is a community the Church of Scotland (CofS) can delight in and should be glad to nurture.

First, this report will present a summary of the discussions held at NYA 2018.
2. End of Life Issues

As this discussion comprised of three subtopics - funeral poverty, child bereavement, and life-limiting illnesses - the input was delivered by three different speakers. The small groups were asked to explore two questions broadly relating to each subtopic.

FUNERAL POVERTY is a generic term used to encompass a range of issues around the difficulties experienced by people with insufficient funds faced with paying the cost of a funeral. In particular Funeral Poverty comprises:

- **Funeral debt**: the inability to pay timeously and in full the cost of a funeral for which a person is responsible
- **Funeral debt burden**: the contribution responsibility for the cost of a funeral plays in a person’s overall experience of unsustainable debt
- **Bereavement poverty**: the effect of financial debt and/or having to adjust the funeral for financial reasons has on the grief experience of the person responsible for arranging and paying for the funeral
- **Funeral industry debt**: the burden of debt carried by the funeral industry as a result of people being unable to pay in full for a funeral for which they are responsible.

Source: Funeral Poverty in Scotland – A Review for Scottish Government

**Question 1: Is funeral poverty an issue in your area/community?**

- Don't know because it isn't spoken about - the culture means that many will not talk about it.
- Not come across it much as not usually young people’s responsibility to pay for funerals.

Several delegates said they didn’t realise how big an issue funeral poverty is because it’s not a subject that is discussed often, either at church or at home. It also became apparent that delegates from poorer communities were more aware of funeral poverty than those from affluent areas.
In the small group setting, some delegates shared their own experiences of funerals. One said they had heard of crowd funding (when people ask for donations online) being used to cover funeral costs. Delegates therefore expressed frustration that young people aren’t advised about funeral planning, with life insurance or funeral policies typically aimed at older people. Some also queried why the cost of burials or cremations differs depending on the local authority area.

Although people on low incomes who receive certain benefits can be given funds from the UK Government to help pay for a funeral, known as the Funeral Expenses Payment, delegates felt that more could be done to make funerals more affordable.

The full group discussion on this question was relatively short, as there was a clear divide in the room of some delegates not being able to determine if it’s an issue where they live, while other delegates were able to give clear examples of how funeral poverty affects their local communities.

**Question 2: What is the Church’s response?**

- Making sure people know that CofS ministers and their services are freely available.
- Engaging with charities, support groups and decision-making bodies on the issue.
In their small groups, delegates recognised that people should be able choose the type of funeral they want, but believed it was also an important part of who we are as the CofS to provide free funerals to everyone in Scotland. Consequently, delegates felt the CofS could do more to make people aware of this option.

The church’s pastoral role was also mentioned in some groups as they discussed examples of local churches offering Bereavement Support Groups or engaging with local charities and organisations who already provide similar services. On a national level, some groups suggested the Kirk could strike up dialogue with local authorities and the Scottish Government regarding funeral costs.

In the full group discussion, one delegate said their church removed the organ charge for funerals, asking for a donation instead, which was one way they had tried to alleviate funeral costs for people locally. While this is not an option for all churches, this was one example of a church seeking to lessen the burden on those paying for a funeral.

While it is ministers who perform funerals, one delegate highlighted that the entire church community has a duty to provide pastoral care to those who are grieving. This is a fundamental part of the Church’s response to funeral poverty and bereavement.
Question 3: How has the culture of funerals/dying changed?

As the input considered how attitudes to dying have changed in the last century, delegates tried to make sense of why this change has taken place. In their small groups, delegates suggested we have ‘sanitised’ dying in spite of it being a ‘part of life’.

Despite the grieving process being respected in the sense that most workplaces afford employees time off to plan a funeral and grieve, delegates felt that the logistics of death, such as funeral plans, are discussed far more than the grieving aspect. This is understandable, yet the CofS has a responsibility to support people in their final stages of life, as well as their friends and family, but we can only do that if we normalise talking about grief.

There were lots of discussions about schools teaching children and young people about death and funerals. There will undoubtedly be children who have experienced the loss of a family member or pet, so it’s only right that they are taught about death, albeit in an age-appropriate manner so they can understand it. However, age-appropriate does not mean shying away from the reality of death and what it means, and delegates felt this was important. Arguably the CofS cannot dictate what is taught in schools, so small groups suggested Sunday Schools, youth groups and uniformed organisations raise the subject with the children and young people in their care.

People see church as a place of guidance. Nobody wants to be the person that says: “Let’s talk about life and death”, but it’s important to talk about it with younger people who have never considered it or had to think about it.
In the full group discussion, the NYA Moderator asked delegates for a show of hands if they have thought about their own funeral, then if they had gone as far as planning their funeral. Approximately half of delegates indicated that they had thought about their own funeral, while only around 10% of delegates had set out their funeral wishes.

It was clear then that more could be done to help young people prepare for death in terms of funeral preparation, and so delegates discussed at length the role of school chaplains. Not every child or young person attends church, so if we only focus on opening up the conversation to those who come through the church doors we would be missing out a huge group of children that ministers interact with outside of the church building.

The conversation quickly moved onto how social media has changed how we talk about death and funerals, with delegates highlighting the pros and cons of Facebook when it comes to publicising funerals or celebrating someone’s life.

Ultimately, the NYA recognised that society’s views on death have changed over the past century or so, and the Church must find ways of engaging with young people in particular regarding funeral planning, dying and grief.

**Question 4: How does the Church fit into the recovery environment?**

- **Making use of Pastoral Care Teams** - visiting people who have been bereaved (doesn’t have to be Minister or Elders).
- **Understanding grieving process** - is long and doesn’t just go away; providing better long-term support.

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**Small Group Discussions**

![Image of a group discussion]
For this question, delegates reiterated how important it is for churches to make the wider public aware that everyone in Scotland is entitled to a CofS funeral, with the minister providing those services free of charge. Additional to this though, delegates said individual churches should better consider how to support people after a bereavement in the long-term – i.e. through support groups or pastoral care visits.

This is an opportunity for communities to rally around those who are grieving, and the church should be at the centre of these efforts. That may mean setting up support groups in community halls rather than in church buildings, and working with charities who already provide emotional support, such as MacMillan Cancer Support.

One delegate highlighted the work of CrossReach and how churches can reach out to them for advice or resources to provide church-orientated support to people.

We spoke about how it’s the church as a whole, not just the minister. We can go round and be a friend – if they don’t want that or want to be left alone the person will tell you.

FULL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The full group discussion briefly spoke about how the recovery environment isn’t just what ministers can do to support those who are grieving, but what the whole church family can do as well. Churches should also be able to signpost people to relevant groups or charities locally who provide professional support or advice.

The conversation moved onto how we prepare people for death when someone is in their final stages of life as many people may start the grieving process before death has occurred. A focus on holistic support for members of people, encompassing pre and post bereavement, was raised, which includes recognising that it may be best to direct people to external, secular organisations who specialise in bereavement support.
Every one of us is on a faith journey and people of the same age can be at totally different stages. That is why every age group should be able to nurture their faith, whether they’re a children, a young adult, a parent or are in residential care.

Consequently, delegates felt that worship services held in local care homes are a key way of nurturing older people’s faith, but also the faith of those living with a life-limiting illness who may be younger. Using technology to live-stream or record services on CDs or tapes was also considered to be an easy way of making church more accessible.

Opportunities for fellowship were also noted as important – with delegates reinforcing the need for social groups to meet during weekdays for people who are retired and may not wish to go out at night. Intergenerational services and social events were also discussed to encourage fellowship among congregations.

We think so much about how we should get young people to connect with faith, but do we spend the same amount of time thinking about how older people actually engage with deeper matters of faith, not just on a Sunday?

This question prompted delegates to share examples of local churches finding ways to help older people nurture their faith, which included car pools to help them get to church regularly, intergenerational afternoon teas, and holding different types of services that cater for all age groups.
Dementia friendly churches were also mentioned, with some delegates sharing how their church has established choirs or social groups for those with dementia so they can still participate in church life, as this involves more than just attending Sunday services.

Delegates expressed that age is just a number - we are all people of God. Fellowship and sharing faith with people of similar and different ages was seen as crucial to faith nurturing.

**Question 6: How can the Church encourage conversations about end of life?**

The small group discussions clearly showed that delegates felt that talking about end of life issues in church would open it up to congregations and hopefully their local communities. The topics could range from funeral planning to mental ill health, to supporting those feeling suicidal, to how to manage grief. Regardless, delegates stressed that while support groups and pastoral care is important, for the CofS to encourage conversations surrounding end of life, the topic would need to be raised in the pulpit.

This was because delegates felt like it might help congregations better understand how end of life relates to our faith, and why it’s something we should actively encourage people to talk about. This was seen as key to breaking down the stigma surrounding grief or poor mental health.

Making people aware of local services available to them was also important to delegates, and many groups felt that churches and their ministers should work with funeral directors, Health and Social Care Partnerships, and the NHS.

"The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." Deuteronomy 31:8
The full group discussion heavily reflected the small groups’ notes as delegates reiterated that we should take advantage of having a captive audience on a Sunday morning to discuss end of life issues. Ideas for doing so included having sermons on the topic (this could be by the minister, a funeral director, or bereavement counsellor), saying a prayer focused on bereavement, or organising coffee mornings or awareness days for end of life issues. Either way, delegates expressed strong support for the topic being discussed in both a practical and faith-centred way during church services.

One of our ecumenical delegates gave an example of what other denominations are doing to kick-start conversations on end of life, so delegates encouraged work to be done ecumenically to benefit as many people in our communities as possible. Resources to help churches start the conversation were considered to be useful.

Since NYA...

Taking these conversations forward, the End of Life Issues group of youth reps considered how to effect change within the church so we become more open to conversations about death and dying. As a result, the group decided to concentrate on the following work streams:

**CONVERSATIONS IN GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT**

One of the main projects we have been working on is creating a resource to encourage dialogue about bereavement. Following the success of other ‘Conversations in...’ resources produced by the Mission and Discipleship Council (M&D), we have begun developing another resource to be part of this series, which currently has the working title “Conversations in Grief and Bereavement”.

In conjunction with M&D’s Young People and Young Adult’s Development Worker, Suzi Farrant, and the then Resourcing Worship Team Leader, Graham Fender-Allison, we invited Rev Gayle Taylor, Child Bereavement UK Counsellor and CoS minister, and Rev Janet Foggie, Pioneer Minister for Stirling Presbytery, to come together with three members of our group (Tara Shannon, Bethany Pringle and Rachel Billes) to reflect on the topic of grief and
bereavement. It was important to have people of various ages with a range of experiences to ensure the end product is accessible and appropriate for all.

The first meeting of this group took place in February 2019, where the nature of the resource was deliberated and existing resources for discussing end of life issues were considered. Progress was also made towards developing the questions that would be used as part of this resource, which took up the majority of the meeting as we pained staked over the wording to ensure it is sensitive to the nature of the topic. However, as the overall aim is to get people talking about grief and bereavement and not be afraid to share their stories, we are looking to make the questions experience-based rather than opinion-based e.g. “Share an experience of a time where…” rather than “what do you believe about…” to encourage individuals to have more open discussions.

This progress was reported back to the whole End of Life Issues working group at the next youth rep meeting, and we have continued to work on the development of appropriate questions. The resource will be completed later in the year, and will be sent to pilot groups for feedback.

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Throughout the year, we have also taken part in social media campaigns based on national and international awareness days on the theme of End of Life Issues.

During Children’s Grief Awareness Week (15-21 November), we shared infographics with grief statistics online to help raise awareness of bereaved children and young people in the UK, and how providing those affected with free, professional support can make the world of difference to their future.
In the lead up to Christmas, we wanted to recognise the difficulties that some people face during the festive season – particularly those who have lost loved ones, whether recently or in the past. Consequently, we wrote a prayer that focused on the four weeks of advent: hope, peace, joy and love; to remember and be thankful (Revelations 21: 4), and recorded someone reading the prayer aloud. The video was then shared on the NYA Facebook page.

On Blue Monday (21 January), we shared infographics online with challenges that encouraged people to think positive and put others first:
Having spent much of the year raising awareness of bereavement through social media, we felt it was only right to fundraise for Child Bereavement UK and signpost the charity as one of many that offers bereavement support.

For the month of March, the NYA therefore encouraged CofS congregations to each raise £25 to acknowledge and further support the work of Child Bereavement UK in their 25th anniversary year (2019). Details were released on the CofS website and a Just Giving page was set up and promoted on the NYA and Child Bereavement UK social media pages.

Child Bereavement UK supports families and educates professionals when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying, or when a child is facing bereavement. If you are interested in finding out more about this charity you can visit https://childbereavementuk.org.

To date the fundraising campaign has raised £1,255. Thank you to everyone who has generously supported this endeavour.

**Group Members**

As a group we would like to extend our thanks to everyone who has helped us throughout the year, especially those involved in helping turn our idea for a resource into a reality, as it will go on to help kick start discourse about bereavement even after our year as youth reps is finished.

Rachel Billies, Blythe Rodger, Esther Nisbet, Bethany Pringle, Tara Shannon, Deborah Nicol
2. Being Ecumenical

In the evening prior to our Being Ecumenical discussion, we held an Ecumenical Human Library that involved Christians from various traditions sharing some of the key aspects of their denomination with the delegates in a workshop-style format. This allowed delegates to forge a deeper understanding of how other Christians worship, what their traditions are, and how their churches are organised before considering how the CofS can develop better relations with other denominations.

For the discussion input, the NYA heard from Rev Dr Liam Fraser about the work of the CofS’s Ecumenical Relations Committee to help us think about ecumenism in Scotland and what it could look like in the future. Following his presentation, the small groups were asked to look at four questions before the Youth Assembly came together to discuss ecumenism as a whole.

**Question 1: What bad effects are there of there being many churches?**

- More churches = less people in each, meaning people can feel more isolated within their communities.
- Dilution of effort and resources – reinventing the wheel rather than collaborating.

This question prompted delegates to consider the downside to their being different denominations within Scotland. The main message emerging from the small groups was the
more churches we have, the fewer people we have in them as we are spread out; as a result churches can become isolated and even competitive. All this hinders our ability to build a genuine relationship and share ideas and resources.

Churches’ occasional reluctance to work together was also mentioned as it gives off a bad impression to external organisations who may question whether we can work in partnership with others when we as Christians often struggle to do so among ourselves.

While having a multitude of denominations can be viewed as a positive due to the variety, delegates in this instance considered how this can be intimidating for those who don’t understand the differences. It’s then also difficult to engage with people who have had a bad experience of Christianity through one denomination if they think all we’re all the same or don’t know what distinguishes us.

Delegates went on to discuss division and sectarianism in Scotland (particularly in the West), and how ingrained ideas about being a Protestant or Catholic are developed from a young age depending on what school you go to.

Our Group discussed that with lots of different denominations and ways of being Christian, there’s a lot of ways to discriminate and become segregated.

FULL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The full group discussion on this question very much reflected the thoughts of the small groups - lots of denominations can lead to confusion at best, and division at worst. Delegates also expressed a frustration over duplication of resources and services, claiming we could save our churches time and money if we collaborated more.

Half-way through the discussion, the NYA Moderator asked delegates for their experiences of other denominations. One delegate said they attended a Catholic school and consequently felt isolated as she wasn’t privy to some of their traditions, had to quickly learn their hymns and prayers, and was ultimately not allowed to take Communion. This was difficult for her.

However, it was also raised that if we put our theological differences aside, the reality is that some denominations are better at doing things locally, while others have a more national perspective. If we worked together, we could develop a more holistic approach to Christianity in Scotland.
Question 2: What good effects are there of there being more than one church?

It was clear that the small groups believed the best thing about there being many churches is the variety in viewpoints and worship styles, meaning that while not every church is for everyone, there is a church for everyone. It was noted that even churches from the same denomination may hold different opinions or worship differently.

Delegates also believed that we could learn from each other and grow in faith by engaging with non-CofS Christians. Considering some delegates regularly attend other denominational services, it was evident that some delegates find it beneficial to their faith formation to share worship at different churches.

On a practical local level, different churches typically means more accessibility in terms of diversity in services, service times and locations. This in turn means more people as able to hear the Gospel, which is ultimately the integral good impact of there being many churches in Scotland.

Again, the Youth Assembly did not dwell on this question for long as delegates were in agreeance that having many different churches is greatly favourable. This is because the NYA felt our faith forms a large part of our personal identity, and just as we are all different,
different styles of worship or ways of thinking helps determine whether a church suits our individual needs.

In contrast to the previous question’s conversation, delegates said different theological viewpoints between denominations actually makes us more accessible as people can find a church that fits their theology.

The ability to establish joint bible studies, holiday clubs and youth groups was also seen as a major bonus, as was sharing resources.

**Question 3: What can we young people do at a local level to improve relations with other Christians?**

- Visit other churches and invite others to our church – mingle and build up working relationships.
- Making connection between Girls and Boys Brigades and similar youth groups in other denominations.

Three main things arose from the small groups conversations on what young people can do to encourage positive ecumenism: breaking down stereotypes, establishing collaborative working, and engaging with youth groups and young people from other denominations.

First and foremost, delegates felt that breaking down the barriers between denominations was a great place to start. This included learning about our own denomination as much as about others, and challenging the stigma surrounding certain denominations (that we as Christian can be guilty of perpetuating at times).

To achieve this, delegates were keen to see youth groups, holiday clubs and Messy Church welcoming people from other denominations, and inviting clergy from other churches to join...
in. Joint bible studies during Advent or Lent were also mentioned, as was sharing services during these times to lighten the load on clergy and ensure a range of services are provided. Some groups even said churches could establish ‘Ecumenical Task Forces’ with a goal to improve ecumenical relations.

One thing we can do at local level is get involved in ecumenical projects in our area; whether it be something our church is leading or movements already going on in our communities.

In the full group discussion, delegates emphasised the need for churches to get involved in their local community to better understand how to serve their locality - this means meeting other Christians as well as people of other faiths or non-faith. Building ecumenical relationships takes time, so why not do so in parallel to being more visible in the community, showing the churches commitment to working with others and being open.

One delegate encouraged churches to learn from university chaplaincy teams as they already have well-established ecumenical models of working. If local areas were able to offer multi-denominational chaplaincy in schools like in universities, this would be a major help in fostering good relations between young people from all walks of life.

The Iona Community was highlighted by a number of delegates who shared their ecumenical experiences while there. Social media was also flagged up as a practical way of encountering other Christians and trying to create an online community to aid both local and national ecumenical relations.

Just as we look to encourage fellowship out with Sunday morning worship - coffee mornings, social events etc. - we should look to engage with people from other churches through the
same means by inviting them to our events and, hopefully, over time they will invite us to be with them too.

**Question 4: Should we work towards there being only one church in Scotland?**

Better to work towards churches working together instead of having one church.

Would need to be more umbrella/collaborative to avoid more confusion within the church.

Although this question was more facetious than serious, it encouraged delegates to really think about whether we should work towards there being only one denomination in Scotland. While the small groups could see benefits to having only one Church, all acknowledged that it was not achievable. Instead, groups noted that it’s far more beneficial to forge stronger bonds between denominations – one group even wrote, aren’t we already ‘one church’?

Delegates proposed alternatives to their being only one church in Scotland, with Ecumenical Parishes being suggested. It was clear then that, while on a national or even international level ‘one church’ would not be workable, what could prove valuable is bringing local churches together to form multi-denomination parishes. This would not remove the identity of different denominations, but would simply enhance all churches’ ability to share the Gospel and serve their communities.

The number of people with faith in Scotland is declining. If we are to be a minority, we should be unified but it’s not about uniformity. It’s about being the body of Christ. God is already creating the church; we are parts of it but we’re not all the same.
During the full group discussion, the phrase ‘unity not union’ was used frequently, with delegates emphasising how being united is important, while being in union is less so. This allowed the conversation to move onto how we become or improve being a united church, rather than the practicalities of forming a unified Church.

However, some delegates did think that, in an ideal world, we should be in union, but recognised this would most likely lead to greater division rather than unification.

Numerous delegates shared examples of denominations working together locally to develop church forums to encourage partnership working, and how this was a prime example of ecumenism in practice. This was believed to be the best outcome - not denominations forming one Church union.

In 1 Corinthians, we learn about the body of Christ as being many parts: “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.” Delegates said this verse can be applied to Christian denominations, and thus they are all equally valued in spite of their differences, and are all part of Christ’s church.

**Question 5: Do you think there’s anything the National Church can do?**

This question was added spontaneously given the flow of the conversation and because delegates were suggesting ways of locally improving ecumenical relations rather than on a national scale.

The National Church could be better at sharing stories of best practice in doing local ecumenical work - where churches have done a good bit of partnership working, this should be more widely known throughout the church.
As well as seeking advice from the National Church - i.e. 121 - delegates took this opportunity to highlight and celebrate what is already being done. Both the GA and the NYA invite ecumenical delegates, which is wonderful, but people also have the opportunity to attend other denominations’ assemblies (NYA delegates have attended URC Youth Assemblies) or go on ecumenical trips. These opportunities are great for those who attend, but it was also mentioned that the channels for reporting back are not far reaching - we need to improve information sharing and communications between local, regional and national levels of the CofS as well as between local churches.

Delegates felt that the fact the NYA was having this debate was a big step forward, as one delegate said they didn’t know what ‘ecumenical’ even meant before the weekend.

Another delegate mentioned that churches in other countries are facing similar issues, in the sense that they want to work together with other faith groups or denominations, but were struggling to find effective ways of doing so. The National Church could reach out to other countries and try to determine best practice for ecumenism at all church levels.

Since NYA...

After NYA, the Being Ecumenical group of youth reps started actively considering how to best carry forward the thoughts and ideas of the NYA. They did this by taking stock of what was said during the discussion and therefore decided to concentrate on the following three work streams:

**CREATING LINKS BETWEEN THE COFS AND OTHER CHURCHES**

We felt it was necessary to create a link between the NYA and the CofS’s Ecumenical Relations Committee (ERC), and to explore the relationship between young people in the CofS and young people from other denominations. We were also clear that, if these links existed, that we wanted to develop them and ensure they stay in place in the future. As well as working with the ERC, we reached out to the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT), which includes the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the CofS, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church; and Action for Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS), which brings together nine denominations.

Fruitful conversations have been had between ourselves and the ERC. After meeting in October with the Reverends John McPake (Ecumenical Officer) and Sandy Horsburgh (Convenor), it was agreed to keep the committee appraised of our current work and this has been done throughout the year. It is hoped that work will continue with the ERC and the NYA and its succeeding organisation as both parties agreed that young people engaging in ecumenism is key to a united church in Scotland.

Following advice from the ERC and the CofS’s Church and Society Council, we looked into the JPIT and how young people can be involved. This led to discussions with the Methodist Church’s representative who is heading up the new Peace and Justice Forum. After positive
discussions with the group who are keen to see the relationship continue after our year in office is ended, we both concluded that discussions will continue and members will attend and engage in the work of the forum where possible. The next meeting is yet to be advertised but will be during the summer.

On top of this, in February 2019 one of the youth reps reconnected with Camp Directors from Michigan, USA. After much discussion, the youth rep was asked to promote ecumenical relations, youth work and their involvement with the NYA at a conference in North Carolina run by the Ecumenical Camps & Conference Centre. ‘RelationSHIFT: The Great Gathering’ will be held on 10-14th November 2019 and the youth rep’s place will be jointly funded by American ecumenical church funds and the CofS.

**COSY GUIDE TO ECUMENISM**

Another project has been the development and production of a resource on ‘Being Ecumenical’. The idea for the resource came as the group reflected on the impact the Ecumenical Human Library (a time at NYA where we heard from representatives from different denominations about their denominations) had on us. As a group we felt that it gave us a great insight into the workings of other Churches and the lives of Christians from other denominations. Our goal for the resource then was to share what we learnt with others and promote a better understanding of what ecumenism is and how to successfully do things ecumenically.

To begin, we determined what should be included in the resource and what form it should take. We decided a downloadable online PDF document was most accessible. Once we had drawn up the list of sections needed to be written, we divided them up between us. At the February meeting we presented our sections and edited them together, before collating them into a single document.

Look out for the COSY Guide to Being Ecumenical coming soon.

**GOOD NEWS STORIES**

It was clear at NYA that there are several good examples of ecumenism at a parish level but it is typically only known by those living locally. We therefore wanted to share ecumenical ‘good news’ stories on the NYA’s social media platforms. This aimed to to raise awareness of the ecumenical work taking place around Scotland and to encourage others to work ecumenically in their community.

First, we researched ecumenical stories that could be condensed for posting online. After finding stories and acquiring pictures to accompany them, we posted them on social media along with the hashtag #GOODNEWS. So far, the stories have gained a lot of attention, with comments praising the ecumenical work taking place across the country. The stories have been published on the NYA Facebook page, with the NYA moderator email
At the beginning of 2018, St John’s Episcopal Church underwent major building refurbishment. As a result, they were left without a church building for almost four months, however, Alloa Ludgate opened their doors to the congregation, allowing shared worship, and ministerial leadership, creating equal balance between Church of Scotland and the Episcopal Church. This is a photo of the Alloa community Holiday club, which joined together different denominations, including Church of Scotland, Episcopal and Baptist. #GOODNEWS

**Personal Reflection (Rebecca Pennykid)**

As a youth rep, it has been a privilege to carry forward and build on the exciting discussions held at NYA 2018. I’ve always been passionate about ecumenical relations, working together as Christians to build God’s kingdom as a whole. NYA itself reflects that work, with delegates from other denominations in Scotland and churches across the world invited. This year we enjoyed the company of guests from a wide variety of churches and countries including Malawi, Lebanon, the United Reformed Church and the Scottish Episcopal Church.

The theme for worship at the event was ‘People of God’ - a very fitting topic when considering ecumenical relations. As Christians we are united by our faith and are all the ‘People of God’ regardless of denomination or tradition. Personally, the most rewarding part of our work this year has been gathering Good News Stories and sharing them on social media. It’s been wonderful to discover how churches within our local communities have worked ecumenically to glorify God, to overcome challenges and to get to know each other. During my time both at NYA and as a youth rep I have grown closer in my relationship with God. NYA gave me an opportunity to make lifelong friends who I am so thankful to share with as we walk together on our journey of faith.

**Group Members**

We would like to extend our thanks to the ERC for its guidance throughout the year and both co-convenors would like to extend an extra important thanks to the members of the group for their fantastic work and enthusiasm throughout the year.

Connor MacFadyen, Gemma King, Amy Hannah, Dana McQuater, Fraser Borland, Rebecca Pennykid

'AND LET US CONSIDER HOW WE MAY SPUR ONE ANOTHER ON TOWARD LOVE AND GOOD DEEDS'

_Hebrews 10:24_
4. Social Media

Our third and final discussion was led by Jane Bristow and Jill Stevens from the CofS’s Communications Team. Their presentation encouraged delegates to consider how we live out our faith online and how local congregations and the National Church can use social media more effectively. Afterwards, delegates explored a variety of questions about what they’d like to see churches post online, as well as their experience as Christians on social media.

**Question 1: What sort of content would you like to see on your local church’s social media channels?**

It’s common for local churches to have websites with information about services, groups meeting in the church and so on, but maintaining a website can be time consuming and costly if churches have to resort to paying someone to design it. Therefore, many delegates felt much of the information found on church websites could be shared on social media which is free and reaches far more people. Delegates also said how the likes of Facebook and YouTube could be used to live stream services.

A common theme from the small group discussions was wanting local churches to use social media to engage in the wider community. This could be by sharing local news and events or supporting local businesses. It was hoped that in doing this, the community would buy into the church’s activities too, helping the church to reach more people and be more visible in the community.

We’d like to see is church notices being posted and events created to share with people what their local church is doing.
The Youth Assembly agreed that local churches should use social media - particularly Facebook - to share what we do on a weekly basis with those who either can't get to or don't go to church. This in itself makes churches more accessible and might encourage people to get involved. It also means that if you are unable to attend church that week, you can keep up to date with what's going on in your congregation.

**Question 2: What sort of content would you like to see on the CofS’s social media channels?**

- Promoting the NYA, Girls/Boys Brigade, the Guild more & posting about events as they happen.
- Content you can engage with, like polls, petitions, and campaigns.

Delegates sought better quality content from the CofS’s social media channels, especially Facebook and YouTube. In terms of Facebook, some small groups discussed how it linked to news stories on the CofS website too often and how they’d rather it was used to promote the work of Committees, Councils, and national organisations - providing people with new and interesting content. Delegates also felt the social media platforms could be used to highlight opportunities of how to get involved in the church on a more national scale - such as the NYA.

That led to delegates suggesting using memes and polls as a fun way to get people talking on Facebook as people don't seem to engage with the posts. Short, snappy content such as images and Bible verses are well shared so that's clearly what people want to see.

We’d like to see the CofS YouTube channel organised better - feels like a dumping ground for videos rather than a platform in its own right good.
The full group discussion primarily focused on the CofS’s YouTube page. While some delegates knew it existed and wished it was better, others were unaware of it. Considering how popular YouTube is with young people, the NYA felt this is a perfect way of engaging children and young people in church activity.

One delegate said the CofS YouTube channel felt like a place for storing videos rather than as a platform in its own right. Consequently, the NYA challenged the National Church to improve its video content, with quality over quantity.

Spotify was also mentioned, as people enjoy listening to music and so the CofS could tap into this by creating playlists for people to subscribe to.

**Question 3: What barriers have you encountered to expressing yourself as a Christian on social media and what can be done to overcome them?**

A strong theme emerged from the small group discussions on this question: young people are anxious about sharing their faith online for fear of what others may think. That’s not because young people are embarrassed of their faith, but given the nature of social media – which can open us up to being challenged or ridiculed for expressing ourselves – some said they would avoid this in their daily lives, so it’s no different from doing so online.

The delegates also feared that, as a result of the press typically only reporting on religion when it comes to a contentious matter, e.g. sexuality, people would assume our views on things if we expressed ourselves as Christians online.
The stigma that comes with being a Christian was a major concern for delegates, especially those who use social media regularly. Despite having many friends/followers who may also be Christian and know we are Christian, we would gauge whether or not to post something based on the reaction we may receive from non-religious friends.

However, delegates did say they were more willing to share their faith online using light-hearted content, such as memes. This was because they felt it important to show people that Christians can be humorous and that we’re not serious all of the time.

The full group discussion mirrored that of the small groups’. One delegate also highlighted that it’s not just your friends who see your social media - your employer and potential future employers are likely to check it too.

Interestingly, several delegates explained that despite having social media, they tend to not post much, but use it to connect with friends rather than share what they’re up to. As a result, many said they didn’t express themselves online in general.

Overall, delegates emphasised their worries about being challenged online and not knowing the answer, or being mocked for expressing their faith - especially by friends.

Question 4: What do you think the CofS could do to help you/churches on social media?

- Facebook Group for all who run their church’s social media pages to support sharing ideas and advice.
- Creating shareable content and keeping people up to date all year long.

‘Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.’

Ephesians 4:29
In their small groups, delegates said they were keen for the National Church to support local congregations by providing social media training or creating online forums so those already running social media pages can share best practice and link up with one another better.

While delegates felt the CofS social media channels (particularly Facebook) do share relevant posts, they wanted more focus on campaigns that churches can engage with or keeping people up to date with Councils’ work, rather than sharing press releases that can be viewed on their website.

Overall, the small groups wanted the CofS to empower local churches to be more active online and to use it to serve their community.

As well as a need to help local congregations improve their social media presence, delegates felt the CofS could make better use of its own social media channels by using them for their purpose – sharing images, short updates etc. – instead of using it to boost traction to their website.

It was noted that the CofS has already produced social media guidance for churches and while this was welcomed, many delegates were frustrated that they weren’t aware of this. This strengthened the NYA’s support for an online forum or group consisting of the admins for local churches’ social media so these types of resources could be easily shared with the right people.

The support for local congregations was seen as crucial for rural churches or those with little to no young people attending, as the NYA thought they might be more likely to struggle with creating and managing social media accounts.
Question 5: What do you think the NYA Youth Reps could do to help you/churches on social media?

Comments from the small groups asked the youth reps to consider producing a COSY Guide to Social Media (or a similar resource) to help local churches improve their content. However, it came to light in the full group discussion that a social media guide already exists and was produced by the CofS Communications team.

Other suggestions included supporting the CofS to create forums or Facebook groups for local churches’ social media admins and launching a campaign or creating a fun social media challenge to encourage us, and others, to share our faith online.

Some small groups reflected on the success of previous NYA campaigns and other denomination’s online videos, so wanted to see social media used to concisely convey the workings of the church by showcasing the different Councils or 121 departments.

It’s one thing to have a guide to using social media, but maybe we need a jargon buster for those who are new to it and trying to run their church’s social media pages.

The full group discussion drew quickly to a close when it became apparent that a social media resource already exists, but delegates asked for it to be shared more widely – either by the youth reps or the CofS.
There was still significant unease in the room about publicising our faith online, which reflected the small groups’ conversations. As such, it was clear that for delegates would like to see the youth reps develop means of doing so in a fun and engaging manner - such as videos, memes, cartoons etc.

Since NYA...

To determine how to best to carry forward the delegates’ thoughts and ideas from NYA, the Social Media team of youth reps reflected on the discussion input and the full group discussions that took place. This caused them to focus on four key areas, which prompted the following work streams:

**WORKING WITH COFS COMMUNICATIONS TEAM**

We noted that a lot of the delegates did not know much about the CofS Communications team or had never heard of their department, despite it effectively being the digital identity of the CofS. It was crucial for us to raise awareness of the work they do to get the national church’s messages out to our congregations and to a wider audience.

As such, we decided that filming an interview with the Communications team about their work and the sort of content they look for would be extremely beneficial. We hope the video will encourage churches to reach out to the Communications department with local stories of interest, as it also provided the Communications team with an opportunity to outline their roles and how best to contact them.

**BREAKING THE STIGMA**

It was obvious at NYA that delegates feel there is significant stigma around being a young person and identifying as a Christian online. Whether this led to bullying or outright denial of faith, the word “Christian” appeared to attract a negative image that seemed impossible to shake. Therefore, we wanted to help break the stigma around Christianity and the misconception that Christians are one type of person and all the same.
To do so, we came up with the hashtag #ImAChristianAnd which aimed to help Christians express themselves online by revealing something not typically thought of as ‘Christian’ about themselves while confessing their faith. Members of the social media team recorded some of the other youth reps and members of their congregations stating: “I’m a Christian and”, followed by a fact about themselves, such as their favourite hobby. These videos were shared on the NYA’s Facebook page and proved to be a quick and easy way to express faith online, but as well as empowering young Christians to share their faith in a light-hearted way, we hope these videos will help change people’s attitudes about what is and isn’t a Christian hobby or pastime.

**SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE**

Thirdly, Facebook was identified as the main social media platform that the majority of congregations use. It was pointed out that some congregations use it effectively and engage well with their communities, while some churches - despite having a Facebook page - are not proactive online. There are also some churches who do not use social media at all. We therefore sought to produce a clear and simple step-by-step guide for congregations on using Facebook as it is a growing platform being used more regularly by churches. We also wanted this resource to communicate the benefits of using social media to churches who may not already be online.

It’s true that we live in a world increasingly dominated by the internet, as we’re able to do almost everything online now. It seems only natural then for churches to begin delving into the realms of social media as a way of communicating with their congregation, their community and the wider church. Our guide therefore focuses on what Facebook can be used for – such as creating events – but also what best to post to engage people.

The guide is a PDF document which has been published as a resource for people to access and use with the aim of getting more congregations online and communicating in a new way. It includes the step by step process of how to create a personal page for yourself and a page for your church with picture
guidance. The resource also includes steps on how to create a post, upload an image or video and other functions of your page.

This is available on the CofS Youth page on the issuu platform [https://issuu.com/cofsyouth](https://issuu.com/cofsyouth).

Twitter is another widely-used platform that an increasing number of ministers and churches are using, so a similar PDF to the Facebook document is currently being put together and will hopefully be published in the near future.

**UTILISING YOUTUBE**

Finally, we realised that YouTube is a platform which the CofS uses but it is not well promoted. Therefore, we were keen to produce a resource about utilising YouTube as a platform to be used by congregations and also the central church.

As YouTube is a video platform, we are producing a video resource to help churches create their own YouTube channels. YouTube channels can serve several useful purposes for churches, such as documenting services. The video resource will therefore provides instructions for setting up a YouTube account and how to upload videos.

**Group Members**

We hope these various videos and publications will help people recognise the benefits that social media can bring. We want to encourage churches to use social media more effectively, hence creating easy-to-follow instructions for Facebook and Twitter. In doing this, we hope churches will feel equipped to create pages to advertise all the good work they do and to reach a wider audience that they may not have otherwise encountered.

We would like to thank the CofS Communications department for being willing to get involved in our work this year, and we hope our efforts will improve churches’ presence online, which is ultimately another means of spreading the Word of God.

Hannah Dunlop, Rachel Hunter, Kaspar Garnham, Nicola Forbes, Shahrukh Gill, Natasha Scotland

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**Lamentations 3:22-23**

Fresh as the Morning, As sure as the Sunrise

THE LORD’S UNFAILING LOVE AND MERCY STILL CONTINUE

Lamentations 3:22-23
5. Worship

Joining together in worship is a large part of the NYA experience. This year the worship team, made up of two delegates and two staff team members, created a varied programme of worship. Many who attend the weekend have only experienced one type of worship style, so the team made sure that several formats were used, thus allowing everyone’s preferences to be catered for and to help them explore different ways of worshipping.

The worship sessions were all themed on the People of God. On the Friday evening, we began by praising our Heavenly Maker for the People of God Gathered, which involved singing various delegates and the CofS Moderator’s favourite hymns. These were asked for in advance of the weekend, and there was an opportunity for the delegates whose hymns were chosen to introduce the hymn and why it’s so special to them. This was an uplifting way to begin the weekend that allowed us to share and sing some of the delegate’s favourite worship songs, and rejoice in the fact that so many young adults were gathered together in the name of God. The delegates and team members were then encouraged to write their name and decorate an envelope to be posted on the chalk boards at the front of the hall, to represent us all gathered together.

Continuing the theme the next morning, worship focused on the People of God renamed - looking at various characters in the Bible who are renamed, such as Simon who became Peter, and Sarai who become Sarah. For this, the delegates listened to the characters’ stories and considered why their names were changed. The act of renaming as a way of bestowing a new sense of purpose on them led to us reflecting on our purpose as individuals, but also as the Youth Assembly, and how we adjust and fulfil our purpose.
On Saturday evening, we moved into one of the small rooms in Gartmore House for a reflective worship on the People of God in All Generations, with the chairs positioned in a circle formation around two wooden pallets in the middle of the room. During this worship session, we heard the story of God calling out to Samuel, yet Samuel believed it was Eli calling on him. As well as thinking about intergenerational working and worshipping, this story prompted the delegates to reflect on whether we know if God is calling on us, and if we do, do we listen? As we thought about this, delegates were invited to come forward during an instrumental to tie a piece of ribbon onto the pallets. This was the most informal worship of the weekend and provided space for delegates to explore what God is calling them to do, and for each of the delegates to, in their own way, respond to God.

For Sunday morning worship we attended Gartmore Parish church. As always, a very warm welcome was extended to us by the congregation as we joined together in worship, and we would like to thank the minister and congregations of Gartmore and Buchlyvie for inviting us to worship with them. It’s always a highlight for so many of the young adults to share in the church service with our friends in Gartmore, and the kindness and hospitality is always much appreciated. It was especially wonderful to welcome members of the congregation back to Gartmore House to share lunch with us and learn more about the local congregation.
In the evening, we celebrated the People of God as Family. For this, we went around the different rooms in Gartmore house in small groups, learning about different characters in the Bible who knew Jesus, before coming together to share communion. Again, this was very much an informal serving of communion, where the bread and wine was passed around us as we stood huddled together in one of the rooms, before sharing the peace with one another. This was an emotive worship session, as the NYA feels like one big family, so it was great that sharing the peace took so long as the delegates embraced and celebrated each other.

Monday morning worship was shared by each of the small groups in their designated rooms, led and prepared by their small group leader. This was centred on the People of God Remember, and it was up to each of the small group leaders to determine what they wanted to do in terms of worship during this time. In recent years, at least one worship session has been experienced in small groups, often led by their small group leader, highlighting how the worship team empowers delegates to take worship and explore worshipping in different ways.

The closing worship session in the afternoon looked at the People of God as One Body. This explored how the NYA is one body - evolving, growing and learning - made up of different parts, yet every part is equal and valuable. In this time we were encouraged to think about what talents and skills we have to offer, and how they contribute to the success of the NYA and the CofS as a whole. This was an inspiring and encouraging end to the weekend.
6. Workshops

Besides the discussions, NYA delegates are given opportunities to learn more about some of the different work going on within the CofS by means of workshops spread across the weekend. This year there were several options which delegates could choose from. Each workshop offered a glimpse into various subjects, some about specific projects undertaken by councils, others which enabled the young adults to explore and develop their faith on a more personal level. Here, some youth reps give an insight to what they gained form each workshop.

6.1 Conversations in Prayer

The Conversations in Prayer workshop followed a similar format to ‘Conversations in Worship’ (which small groups at NYA 2017 worked through) and ‘Conversations in Belonging’, which was used in the small groups at the start of NYA this year. This was led by Suzi Farrant and Liz Crumlish, and much like the other ‘Conversations In...’ resources that the Mission & Discipleship Council have produced, this workshop made way for a safe, welcoming environment where open and honest chats could take place.

The structure for this was an opening prayer, five questions that we were given one at a time with a few minutes to discuss, and a closing prayer. Each of the questions asked us to think about our own experiences of prayer and we split into groups to discuss them. The room was quite quiet after each question while people reflected on it, but then there was a buzz as people shared their thoughts. There was a timer which went off to indicate that we were moving on to the next question. For some questions we had finished talking before the timer but for others we were all still deep in conversation.

Everyone had something valuable to contribute to the conversation - some experiences proving similar while others were very different. It was so interesting to hear other people’s experiences of praying; when they learned or discovered something meaningful about prayer, when prayer felt like a struggle or disappointment, why how we pray can change, and what keeps them praying in the ordinary times. These conversations forced me to think about prayer in a new way and gave me useful tips and insights about how to explore prayer as part of my faith journey.
6.2 Preparing and Leading Worship

Phill Mellstrom, Worship Development Worker, led the Preparing and Leading Worship workshop, which enabled delegates to consider their personal response to worship. We discussed what different worship styles we enjoyed; what defined worship for us as young people, and learned how we may prepare and lead worship in a creative way.

We considered different styles of church worship - traditional services, blended services (e.g. family services) and world church. We also learned ‘leitourgia’ (the Greek word for liturgy) which literally translates as ‘the work of the people’. From this we challenged our ideas of worship, posing questions such as ‘how can it be ‘the work of the people’ if the people are not involved?’

As a group, we then discussed different ways we worshipped as individuals or as part of a wider community, such as through prayer, bible study, attending church and volunteering. We concluded that worship should be an ongoing expression and began to evaluate how we can continually worship God, striving to fulfil a ‘complete life of worship’.

This was beneficial as it empowered delegates to evaluate their worship - whether they worship differently depending on their mood, the occasion or setting, why they worship in that way, and how this might inform how they would prepare to lead worship in different settings.

6.3 The Bible: Don’t Go It Alone

This workshop, led by Jo Love, explored different ways of reading the Bible and how this can be brought to life in a group setting. The participants were split into four groups and each group was given a Bible passage about John the Baptist. Each group was also allocated a different type of poem e.g. Haiku or Limerick, and asked to make the passage into a poem of that style in a set time limit. At the end of this time each group was asked to present and read out their poem to the whole workshop.

The groups were asked to discuss the assumptions you would make about the characters if you had no prior knowledge of the passage. Each group had quite different answers, which allowed people to hear ideas they wouldn’t have considered if reading alone.
Jo explained that each group had the same story but from a different gospel. New groups were created so each had someone who had used a different gospel in the original story. Another discussion was held to discuss the similarities and differences of each of the passages and how they each told the same story in a different way. This allowed for reflection upon the target audience and key messages of the each gospel. The 90 minutes were concluded with a full group game of word association.

The overall messages of this workshop were that reading the Bible does not have to be a daunting or even lonely experience. Sharing with other people allows the text to come to life. The techniques used are easy to repeat and created an informal, relaxed atmosphere that encouraged expression of opinions and ideas.

6.4 How Can We Do Politics Differently?

This workshop focused on the work from the Church and Society Council's ‘Speak Out’ campaign, which was based around the results of the 2015 ‘Speak Out 10,000 Voices for Change’ engagement exercise where almost 11,000 voices from all around Scotland were heard. From this, seven key themes were deduced to become the council’s focus for the next few years. One of the seven focuses highlighted the necessity to ‘do politics differently’ and as such the workshop we engaged in at this year’s NYA looked at the innovative and exciting work the Church and Society Council has been doing in this area.

We heard about the Council’s aim to involve local communities in politics, especially with their ‘Meet Your MSP’ and ‘Meet Your MP’ campaigns which launched in 2016 and 2018 respectively. These projects helped congregations build relationships with their local political representatives. It was really interesting to hear that many MSPs and MPs themselves were keen to get involved in congregational work and meet the people involved in local church life. It was refreshing to see this more personal view on politics - barriers were being broken down and it was clear to see that local representatives were really engaging with local people. At these events, MSPs and MPs would listen to any concerns and answer questions on issues raised at the events while also learning about the amazing work being done by CoS congregations.

Following this introduction, we split into groups and spent the majority of the workshop role playing as the main political parties in Scotland. Each group was given a response from one of the party leaders on a particular issue - at the time this was Nicola Sturgeon, Kezia Dugale, Willie Rennie, Patrick Harvie and Ruth Davidson - then were asked to answer questions sticking to the party leaders’ answers as if we were them. The questions came from videos that the Council recorded of ‘everyday people’ to highlight some of the pressing issues facing the people of Scotland. These were all real life situations, and our particular case study looked at the life of a women who had come to Scotland a number of years ago and had since developed mental ill-health and living in poverty.
Having to be critical and evaluate the party leaders' responses in order to respond to the video bettered our understanding of their political opinions, but it was also fascinating to see their different perspectives on tackling social injustice. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, we noticed that each of their responses started with stating their empathy and understanding of the issues mentioned, before eventually spiralling into broad and impersonal phrases about their parties’ general ideologies. Instead of helping respond to the questions raised it became a sales pitch for their own party - this in itself highlighted the need for doing politics differently.

Finally, we ended our discussion with whether the Church as a whole should take a more political stance and whether Christians in our everyday lives and congregations should engage more thoroughly with politics. Some clear benefits were highlighted but also concerns about the church not remaining nonpartisan.

Learning about politics and how it interconnects with the CofS was really insightful. The success of the Council’s campaigns in encouraging congregations to engage with their elected representatives and politics more generally highlighted how politics impacts our lives, but also the problems with ‘how we do politics’ which need to be improved on. This workshop provided an analytical approach to politics and emphasised its relevance to us as a Youth Assembly and why we should not shy away from being politically engaged.
6.5 Community Development

The Community Development workshop took place on the Sunday afternoon and was one of four issue-based workshops that invited guest speakers to educate delegates on specialised topics – in this case Asset-Based Community Development (hereafter referred to as ABCD). John Finch and Naomi Dornan from the Priority Areas Committee led this workshop.

Delegates were given three case studies of varying length, giving accounts of the principles, values and successes of ABCD. In the time given, we were each invited to read one account and then discuss them within smaller groups. The case studies gave examples of churches and outreach programmes that sought out the skills and talents already present within their communities. After establishing these assets, the programmes were aligned to the specific circumstances.

The circumstance-driven response was the common thread between each document. The purpose of the case studies was not to provide a recipe for success, but rather demonstrate the approach taken as you cannot decide upon a recipe until you know the available ingredients. Each document set out the intention to involve members of the community, as opposed to them merely being recipients of aid. This was summed up as an attitude of ‘working with’ as opposed to ‘doing for.’

This workshop challenged delegates to reconsider how we respond to community development, as perhaps too often we focus on what is ‘missing’. It is important to avoid this way of thinking in which we fail to recognise the gifts already present. We are one body in Christ and God gives each member its own talents that should be celebrated and capitalised upon. As we are reminded in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6;

'THERE ARE DIFFERENT KINDS OF GIFTS, BUT THE SAME SPIRIT DISTRIBUTES THEM. THERE ARE DIFFERENT KINDS OF SERVICE, BUT THE SAME LORD. THERE ARE DIFFERENT KINDS OF WORKING, BUT IN ALL OF THEM AND IN EVERYONE IT IS THE SAME GOD AT WORK.'

6.6 Forces Chaplaincy

Mark Dalton and Mark Davidson, both Royal Navy chaplains, began the workshop by giving a brief overview of their roles and an insight into a typical day in the life of an armed forces chaplain.

At previous Youth Assemblies, forces chaplains have led similar workshops or been involved in one of our human libraries, so some delegates were already familiar with this form of ministry, while others hadn’t met an armed serviced chaplain before so it was a prime opportunity for them to learn more about being a chaplain in the forces.
For the first 20 minutes or so, the conversations focused on their experiences of war and conflict – during which they’re constantly performing a pastoral role to people who have no connection to their day-to-day support networks of friends and family. Being in the same position as the forces personnel they service, they must also minister to themselves. Considering the Church recognises how emotionally challenging being a parish minister can be, the chaplains’ ability to lift people’s spirits during difficult times while living in often unsafe circumstances highlighted their own spiritual strength.

Delegates were then able to ask the chaplains any questions we had, and what surprised us was how honest the men were. They did not shy away from admitting how draining their role can be, or how they often feel forgotten about by the Kirk while they’re on post. It was clear that unlike parish ministers who have their congregation and other local ministers around them to turn to and rely on during hard times, forces chaplains are not afforded this network, either when away or even at home when they return.

Towards the end of the discussion, delegates asked them about their experience of women in the forces, and how they relate to their female forces chaplain colleagues. This topic was struck up because one of the ministers on the NYA pastoral team was in the navy before becoming a minister, so we were intrigued to hear the chaplains’ perspective on gender equality within the forces. This led us to ask them about how many female forces chaplains there are or that they have encountered, and how they feel their experiences would differ to the likes of a female forces chaplain.

Overall this was an insightful conversation that allowed delegates to enter into a frank discussion with the chaplains about the role and how it impacts their faith and even personal lives.

Whether you are a pacifist or not, it is only right that Christians find ways to minister to everyone regardless of where they find themselves. Forces chaplains therefore provide an integral service to armed forces personnel as they profess God’s love for them, and offer crucial pastoral services.

6.7 Faith in Schools

This workshop, led by Rev Sandy Fraser, was a great forum for delegates to share our experiences of both chaplaincy and Religious Education in school. To begin, Sandy Fraser spoke about chaplaincy, giving an account of his experiences of working in schools. He gave some positive examples of how the church can support schools out with taking school assemblies, which ranged from supplying indoor shoes and clean clothes for children who cannot afford them, to providing teachers with pastoral support. As a group we discussed our individual experiences of school chaplaincy, primary and secondary, both positive and negative. Through reflection it was highlighted that some of the best experiences of school chaplaincy were when the chaplain had built up a positive relationship with the school,
having gained the trust of both the pupils and the staff. In these situations the chaplain was seen as part of the school community and was able to provide support in multiple aspects of school life. Some of the less positive experiences of school chaplaincy included situations when chaplains only came into the school to lead assemblies and did not appear to fully engage with pupils. Some people did not have any contact with a school chaplain, which was often the choice of individual head teachers. The question was raised as to what the church can do if schools do not want to welcome chaplains into their school communities.

We also discussed Religious Education in schools and our different experiences of these classes. Some delegates’ schools had great RME departments and the subject was well taught, whereas for others RE wasn’t seemingly taken seriously by teachers or pupils alike. We also briefly touched on the issues we faced as people of faith when at school. For example, delegates felt it was difficult to find a space to explore faith within school as other peers could not relate to this aspect of our lives. From our own experiences, particularly in secondary school, this is an aspect that chaplains did not seem to address.

Overall, this workshop was informative and provided an insight into the benefits that a good working relationship between local churches and schools can produce, but also the challenges facing ministers and congregations when trying to establish this relationship.

6.8 International Experiences

One of the many opportunities for young people within the CofS is to take part in a number of international trips that offer not only the opportunity to learn about other cultures, faith and denominations, but to live in the love of God and realise the global effect faith has. No person, or faith group, is an island and these trips enable us to truly realise this.

Leading the workshop, four members of the Youth Assembly discussed their experiences of international trips – what they meant to them as part of their faith formation and what they learned from their travels.

Former NYA moderator, Robin Downie, was joined by Gigha Lennox who began by discussing a recent interfaith trip to Rwanda with a group of young Muslims. The profound effect that the Rwandan Civil war had on the physical landscape, the people of Rwanda and
their faith was an eye opener for the group, but through interfaith dialogue scars are beginning to heal between groups who were previously at war with each other. This was a moving and faith-challenging experience for all involved.

Next, Connor MacFadyen discussed two recent trips he had been involved in – first, the Conference of European Churches General Assembly in Novi Sad, Serbia, and then the National Youth Assembly of the Church of Pakistan in Lahore. Both ecumenical in nature, Connor reported how it was awe-inspiring to see how faith can truly transcend petty and at times bitter arguments when it comes to discussing the state of the world or the love of God. It was also interesting to see how other denominations worship and operate, and was particularly fascinating in the Church of Pakistan’s context as they are an amalgamation of three denominations that came together in the 1970s. To this day they still use aspects from all three original denominations. Another striking note was the reverence many churches have for the CofS. The Kirk had a church in Pakistan for decades which became one of the three churches that merged to create the Church of Pakistan. On a visit to Sialkot (the area where the first church missionaries went in Pakistan) he met a CofS missionary who had been there for over 40 years and the love for the “mother church” in that area is strong, with the burning bush still being its logo and a huge reverence for the ministers that served there.

To conclude, former NYA moderator, Andrew McPherson, talked about his trip to Japan and North Korea with the World Mission Council – areas that still bear the scars of war and division, with conflict ongoing to this day. This was also an opportunity to witness the efforts of churches in the region to establish peace and reconciliation between governments and the people. Andrew said it was an emotional trip as he learned of the full extent of the horrific bombings in Japan during the Second World War. However, the trip as a whole enabled him to better understand the CofS’s links between these countries, saying it was a positive trip filled with opportunities for fellowship.

After the presentations there was a time for questions which was greatly received by the speakers. Those who attended the workshop enjoyed hearing these good news stories and discussed the logistics behind such trips which resulted in some delegates considering future international trip opportunities.

Please keep an eye on our social media channels where opportunities are posted and also on the website: https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/children_and_youth/young_adults/international_trips.
7. Fellowship

The fellowship experienced by delegates over the weekend is one of the most important parts of NYA - the act of gathering together with one shared focus and belief creating a buzz and sense of purpose for attendees. From small group icebreaker challenges and games, the meals we share together to a late night ceilidh and the even later CoSY Café, there is always time to socialise and get to know one another at NYA and build up our community.

For many, NYA offers a rare (perhaps the only) chance to gather with our peers for worship. Some congregations gladly encourage their one and only 17-25 year old to attend; others will send a small group of young adults from their church to attend. However many people a person may know on the Friday evening, come Monday afternoon at the close of the event, everybody leaves with a sense of belonging and with several new and lasting friendships.

Meeting new people and chatting about current issues that affect us all as Christians, develops a deeper faith and understanding of our world. One of the most difficult things for a delegate attending the event is saying goodbye to both new and old friends and go back to their local church, keeping that energy and buzz going.

Fellowship links us all together to become a community of Christ and helps us on our faith journeys back in our own parishes in the months after NYA. For older delegates who are no longer able to attend due to being 25+, the fellowship they found during their NYA journey has supported them as they find their way within the church as someone who is no longer considered a young adult.
8. NYA Reflections

8.1 Amy Hannah (first time NYA delegate)

Last May, I was accepted to go to the General Assembly (GA) as a Youth Representative for the Presbytery of Irvine and Kilmarnock. I had never been to the GA before, so was both excited and apprehensive about the experience. I knew I would be going to Edinburgh for a week and staying with a group of people I had never met before. As I was on holiday shortly before, I joined in with activities two days in, which meant I had missed all introductions and scheduling for the week. This of course made me more apprehensive as I would have to rely on asking my fellow youth representatives or the youth rep staff team for help with anything we were to do, or for anything I didn’t understand. However, when I got to Edinburgh, I headed straight to the Heart and Soul event held in Princes Street Gardens.

After asking around, I finally found all the NYA, youth and presbytery reps that I would be spending my week with. Everyone was so friendly and welcoming; everyone immediately wanted to find out more about me and asked me to join them for dinner. This was a great chance to get to know some people there before we began the work for the week.

During GA, I found out about the National Youth Assembly and that there was still time to sign up. I had never heard of it before, but after finding out some more information about it, I thought it sounded great, especially since I had now made friends that would also be going. When the time came, I drove myself to Gartmore House, again with some apprehension about the weekend as I had never been before and didn’t really know what was involved. When I got there, I was greeted by people I had met at GA, so it was comforting to see friendly faces as soon as I got there, directing me where to go.

Throughout the weekend, I met even more people as we delved into the discussions that were planned. Every morning talk, small group discussion, worship session and big group session were all interesting and I was learning so much from the other delegates. Although the weekend is very full, with only some personal time for coffee and cake, I was never bored. Even out with the planned activities of the weekend, there were always things to do, or sessions and discussions to be a part of. The ceilidh that was held for everyone was also great fun; it was really good for everyone to let their hair down and have a good dance.

At NYA, applications were being accepted for youth representatives for the next year. I thought it would be unlikely that I would be selected as a youth rep as it was my first year at
the Youth Assembly, and perhaps not enough people would know me well enough to vote me in. However, I thought I would apply for the Being Ecumenical Group anyway. To my surprise, it was announced that I would be one of 18 youth reps and I was thrilled.

Since then, the meetings and group work that I have been involved in so far have been fantastic. This opportunity has allowed me to utilise my ecumenical experience while allowing me to continue to learn more about this topic from my fellow youth reps as we progress the work of the NYA. All the knowledge, experiences and memories I have and will create are because I decided to attend NYA, and I’m so happy that I did. It has been a very worthwhile experience.

8.2 Fraser Stockton (last time delegate)

Being a Christian teenager or young adult can often feel like a lonely place. You feel that despite many people’s best intentions, your voice isn’t being heard at a local or national church level, and when you look to find someone to have a rant about this with, the nearest person to your age range is at least 20 years older!

I’m sure it was in this teenage angst that, when I was given the opportunity to be St. Andrews’ Presbytery youth rep at the General Assembly (GA), I jumped at the chance. It was here that I finally found out about the National Youth Assembly (NYA).

NYA was presented to me as an annual gathering where young adults connected to the CofS are given an opportunity to share their voice on the church and where it’s place in our world should be. When I attended my first NYA I was introduced to a group of young people from not only across Scotland but across the world (Hungary, Malawi, America etc.) who were passionate about their faith, and wanted their voices heard in order to improve the church and the world we are a part of.

During my years as an NYA delegate, we discussed topics as varied as climate change, social media, how the church allocates finances and end of life issues. Throughout these discussions I have had my eyes opened to the breadth of opinions amongst the young people in our church but equally their ability to engage and compromise with each other to find a constructive viewpoint to put forward and make positive change.

NYA has provided me with a variety of opportunities to improve upon my own skills. An important part of the weekend are the workshops through which I’ve developed a more thorough knowledge of the structure of the national church and its history. I’ve engaged in
workshops on leading church services, the eldership and prayer. Ultimately I believe NYA has
given me a wide variety of skills that I now use inside and out of a church setting.

It's a strange feeling at the age of 26 to be told that you are “too old” for something in the
CofS, but sadly that is now the case for me and the NYA. I leave however having met a large
group of people I now consider very special to me and who I would probably never have met
had it not been for the NYA. Having joined seeking to find a platform so that my voice could
be heard in the national church, I have come away equipped with skills that allow me to share
my talents and express my opinions in my local congregation as well as on committees I’m a
member of throughout the church. The NYA has provided me with the foundations that have
allowed me to accept the offer of becoming an Elder within my local church.

8.3 Rev Fiona Reynolds (first time team member)

This was my first ever National Youth Assembly. I wasn’t aware of its existence when I was in
the requisite age-bracket, probably because of my involvement in the Royal Navy during
those years. Whatever the reason, NYA is something I have only become aware of since I
started training for ministry. As such, I was keen to understand what it is and how it operates,
both for my own knowledge and also for any application in my current (first) charge.
Furthermore, I was (and still am) particularly interested in two of the three areas of discussion
for 2018: End of Life Issues and Being Ecumenical. It seemed a good year to approach Suzi
and ask if she were looking for volunteers!

Both the training day in June and the weekend itself were really interesting, and I learnt a
great deal. Of course, I learnt more about the various topics of discussion and how the whole
process works. This was to be expected. Beyond that, I was able to reflect on a few things
about myself and “young people”. The first was my ability to interact with people in their late-
teens and early-twenties. Throughout training I had this fear that I would be irrelevant and
couldn’t relate to anyone under the age of 30 (I’m afraid I’ve been mentally middle-aged
since I was 12!). What I learnt over my time with the NYA was that is not true. Age, to a large
extent, is irrelevant when it comes to relating to, pastoring to, being in relationship with,
anyone. What is important is that we meet others on their terms and really see them, really
listen to their story.

Which brings me to my second reflection: I really struggle with age-delineation within the
church. My own experience of Sunday School was not positive; I much preferred to be in the
Sanctuary, in worship. I did not understand a lot of what was being said but the experience
was important to me. The NYA affirmed this for me. The passion, faith and knowledge of
those in attendance was as relevant and important as anyone else’s - and the wider church
needs to hear it better. Indeed, not just hear but really listen. We need to stop segregating
and start integrating faith stories and personal lives in order to really be the Body of Christ.
I am now going to contradict myself in some ways because I think there is something where age - or at least generation - matters. Listen to the popular rhetoric and you would be forgiven for thinking no one under 35 commits to anything. This, as a sweeping generalisation, is not only unhelpful, but untrue. That weekend, I witnessed people who were deeply dedicated to their faith and to being Disciples of Christ. And I realised that, perhaps the reason ‘younger people’ don’t seem to be committing to the church is because they have so much respect for what such a commitment entails. There are thousands of CofS members who are over the age of 35, who took membership vows in their late teens because it was the ‘done thing’, but now have nothing to do with their local congregation. In contrast, I believe younger people take the responsibility of membership (and other) vows seriously - so seriously in fact, that they won’t countenance making any vows that they do not think they can keep. Again, this is a sweeping generalisation, but I began to realise that weekend how powerful vows of faith are to many young people.

Overall, the weekend gave me the confidence to throw myself into ministry with children and young people, in a way that encourages the generations to mix more. I passionately believe that everyone has something to contribute to the church, the Body of Christ, and the NYA has emboldened me in my ministry to push age-boundaries and start exploring what that looks like in my current charge.

**8.4 Rev Shuna Dicks (returning team member)**

I was involved with NYA for a number of years back when employed by the then Board of Parish Education and subsequently Mission & Discipleship Council. I had enjoyed my involvement then, so when the opportunity came more than a decade later to be involved again I jumped at the chance.

NYA has been a very special event for me as it was during a conversation with a young person at an NYA that I first sensed my call to ministry. For that I will always be grateful.

Over the years I was involved I got to know a lot of young people within the CofS and have remained friends with many. It has been a privilege and delight to watch so many of them take up roles within the church both locally and nationally, and to see how some have discovered their own calling to ministry has been wonderful. I very much look forward to this year's NYA and being part of the team once again.
9. Through the Year

9.1 A Year as Moderator

I’m absolutely bursting with pride at what has been achieved this year. The team that I have been working with have all been so passionate and committed to making a difference and I feel so privileged to have been a part of it. Seeing the work that the youth reps have put in to spreading God’s word has been inspiring.

This year we have faced difficult, yet relevant topics that led to some very thought-provoking and emotional discussions, which were handled with grace and compassion by all delegates. From these discussions, the youth rep team have made some amazing progress to forming resources and putting their faith into action.

Over and above the work the youth reps have been doing, we also found time to participate in Sleep in the Park in December to raise money to help eradicate homelessness across Scotland. We had 10 young people from NYA in Edinburgh and four in Glasgow, and between us we raised over £4,500, including Gift Aid.

My personal journey this year has led me to the Guild Annual Gathering, which was such a warm and positive experience - I can’t thank the Guild enough for their hospitality and encouragement. The fellowship and joy shared at the event was similar to that of the NYA, which made me feel very at home.

In September to mark the Year of Young People, I was asked to compare an event at the Scottish Parliament to draw attention to the work that is being done by and for young people. There were many CofS organisations there, including NYA, who were all sharing the work they do. It was a really enjoyable evening for all involved.

As my year draws to an end this summer, some youth reps and I are looking to participate in Tough Mudder (range of obstacle courses and mud runs) to raise money for Richmond Hope; a Scottish charity that provides support for children and young people aged 4-18 years who have been bereaved.

In my role as NYA Moderator, I have also attended events with the GA Moderator, the Rt Rev Susan Brown. During my time as NYA Moderator, she has inspired me and supported me. I’ve also been fortunate to visit 121 on several occasions this year, so it’s been great learning more about what goes on behind the scenes.
9.2 A Year as Clerk

We are all called to serve and finding that tangible way to serve that utilises your gift is such an amazing feeling. This is how I feel about the opportunity to serve as the Clerk to the NYA.

From start to finish, my year has been filled with joy. That's not to take away from the fact that putting together the Blue Book report and this Supplementary report has been exhausting and, at times, challenging. Regardless, all my Clerk duties have been a pleasure and I’m extremely thankful this privilege.

The weekend of NYA itself was interesting for me as I was suddenly on the other side – I was recording the conversations rather than being involved and someone else noting down my thoughts. It was also quite stressful making sure I captured the delegates’ thought processes and ideas throughout the whole weekend as well as finding time to socialise AND time to sleep! However, it was as it always is, a grace-fuelled weekend, and I will always cherish the NYA for that.

While it is mostly the youth reps who take the discussions forward and put the NYA’s plans in motion, as Clerk I have assisted the teams in any way I can as I have attended all of the youth rep meetings. Turning notes and recorded discussions into action is not an easy task, but the youth reps have all worked tirelessly in their roles to do the NYA’s discussions justice.

Since the NYA, I’ve been writing Tales of Clerk Life articles that are posted on the NYA Facebook page. This has been a collection of my adventures and thoughts throughout the year.

Like the Moderator, I too have been fortunate enough to join the GA Moderator on various trips, including our visit aboard HMS Defender in March. The tour of the ship was fascinating and it was great to meet members of the armed forces and forces chaplains to learn more about their jobs.

I also attended the YoYP event at Holyrood, which was also a great opportunity to showcase the NYA as we spoke with MSPs and other youth organisations about our work and purpose.

Being Clerk isn’t my only church role however, as I am also an Elder in my home church. Having the support of the session and the wider congregation has been a blessing, and it’s with their love and encouragement that I even made it to being Clerk. I cannot thank them enough and look forward to continuing with my Elder duties once my time as Clerk comes to a close.
Much of the Clerk's work goes unnoticed by most, but the one thing I learned before taking on the role was that to do God's work, you sometimes have to take a backseat. That is not to insinuate that Clerk is a lesser role compared to that of the Moderator, nor to say it's more important, however, while at times I have felt put aside by some people, I am so proud to have been the Clerk as it has allowed me to put my gifts to good use for God.

Tamsin has been a wonderful Moderator and an absolute delight to work alongside. She is passionate, dedicated and pastoral in everything she does, and I know she will go on to do many great things. The youth reps have equally been amazing and their hard work must be applauded.

This year has been incredible so far, and one I’ll forever treasure. I wish Dana and Hannah every blessing as they prepare to step into the roles of Moderator and Clerk at NYA 2019. Tamsin and I have been delighted to have them as part of the youth rep team this year, and I know the NYA will blossom in their more-than-capable hands.

9.3 Youth Representative Reflections

9.3.1 Kaspar Garnham (first time NYA rep)

Prior to attending, I had never even heard of the NYA as I had spent around 12 years outside of the church. However, these past few years I’ve become more involved in the church, following my calling, and I was encouraged to go to NYA from both my ministers. Attending NYA flipped my old understandings of the church that I was raised in and I have now found my home within the church.

The months leading up to NYA, learning about its structure, the Blue Book and the roles of NYA youth representatives was a steep learning curve. During the weekend I had been asked several times if I wanted to run as an NYA youth rep and each time I respectfully turned it down as I felt I had nothing to offer. After one difficult evening during the event and talking to one of the pastoral team, I explained my transgender identity, how I didn’t know if the church would allow me to follow my calling into ministry, yet again I was asked to run as a representative. The acceptance I experienced during the weekend and the friends I made showed I might have something to give. I put my name forward, not expecting to be picked, to then be voted in as a youth representative.

This past year has been a great experience working with other youth reps and developing the ideas we all had from the discussions during the NYA weekend. It has helped me gain a
deeper understanding of the inner workings of the church, strengthen friendships and provide me with opportunities I never would have expected. As a youth rep I have spoken to a guild group, represented the CofS at the United Reformed Church’s Youth Assembly, and helped carry forward the discussions from NYA. Being an NYA rep has been so rewarding and I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to learn and grow.

9.3.2 Tara Shannon (two times NYA rep)

During NYA delegates vote to elect 18 Youth Representatives to take on the weekend’s ideas and discussions for the year. I have had the privilege of being a youth rep for the second year running, having been involved in the Young People and Discipleship group last year, and am currently part of the End of Life Issues group.

This has been an eye-opening and exciting experience but one that has required a lot of dedication. Each year we have worked hard to produce resources and materials to raise awareness of the discussions which we took part in over the NYA weekend.

As a youth rep, I have delighted in being part of the voice of young people within the CofS, and being able to empower other young people to have their say. I have worked alongside a really committed and wonderful group of youth reps who want to help shape the future of the Kirk.

The opportunity to be a youth rep has been one of the best experiences of my life, getting to see how young people can make an impact within the church they love and meeting like-minded passionate young people to travel my NYA journey with.

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Psalm 73:26
9.4 Engaging Online

This year we have continued to use our social media platforms to promote the work of the NYA and share reflections, bible verses and prayers. From October onwards, we posted a #NYAVerseOfTheDay every Sunday on Facebook and Instagram. We tied this in with the Advent season and uploaded an Advent prayer video on Facebook to remember those who find Christmastime difficult.

Throughout the year, we also engaged in various international and national social media campaigns, including the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence to challenge violence against women and girls. The campaign runs every year from 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to 10 December, Human Rights Day. The youth reps showed their support by taking pictures of themselves holding signs saying ‘I Stand Against Gender-Based Violence’ or with the #ThursdaysInBlack, #FaithAgainstGBV, #16Days, and #HearMeToo hashtags.

At one of the youth rep meetings, we showed our support for World Aids Day (1 December) by connecting our wrists together using glow sticks (as we didn’t have shoe laces) and took a photo for Facebook.

The End of Life Issues small group got involved in awareness days and weeks, including Mental Health Awareness Week (6-12 October) and Children’s Grief Awareness Week (15-21 November), sharing facts about mental health and child bereavement, and got involved in Blue Monday (21 January) by sharing challenges for the day to encourage self-care and positive thoughts. They also launched an online fundraising appeal during March to help support families affected by the death of a child by encouraging congregations to raise £25 to mark the 25th anniversary of Child Bereavement UK.

On Social Media Sunday the Social Media small group promoted the CofS’s social media platforms. They also shared #ImAChristianand videos that included clips of Christians saying ‘I’m a Christian and...’ followed by the likes of a hobby they have, what music they enjoy, or what sport they play. This is to break down the stigma of what it means to be a Christian. They also have shared good news stories on Facebook from local congregations and linked in with the Ecumenical Relations group to share ecumenism examples.

In December, some youth reps and NYA delegates took part in Social Bite’s Sleep in the Park (Saturday 8 December). On the run up to the event, they appealed for donations to help end homelessness in Scotland. Between them - 10 in Edinburgh and four in Glasgow - they raised over £4,500 thanks to the amazing support they drummed up online, which led to congregations, friends and family helping them smash their funding targets twice. On the night, they used Facebook Live to share what they were doing and how they were feeling to inform those who helped them fundraise and further raise awareness of the event and its goal.
Since October we have been given monthly insights to Clerk Life, courtesy of Seonaid who has used the NYA Facebook page to share a number of reflections, painting a picture of a year in the life of the NYA Clerk.

Our Twitter presence has also remained active this year as Tamsin has used the NYA Moderator account to update her followers on all she’s been up to in her role. During the NYA Planning Weekend, Tamsin took over the Church of Scotland Voices Twitter feed to share snapshots of what the weekend entailed.

It’s been encouraging to see the responses we’ve had on our social media channels, with each of the online campaigns being shared by a good number of people and hearing from our friends and followers from across the country and overseas as they have joined our online community.

To engage with the NYA’s activities online, please follow our web and social media sites:

www.churchofscotland.org.uk/nya  www.instagram.com/cofs_nya/
www.twitter.com/nyamoderator  https://issuu.com/cofsyouth
www.facebook.com/cofsnationalyouthassembly

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FOR WE ARE GOD’S HANDIWORK, CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS TO DO GOOD WORKS, WHICH GOD PREPARED IN ADVANCE FOR US TO DO.

Ephesians 2:10
9.5 NYA Planning Weekend 2018

Part of what makes NYA so special is that the event is planned by the young people. In January 2018, 35 young people gathered in Arbroath to brainstorm ideas for how to make NYA 2018 a success. The weekend is split into planning sessions, worship sessions and some down time to enjoy catching up with each other. It’s a relaxed weekend, considering what all we have to get done!

The first planning sessions we spent talking about what we enjoyed about NYA, what works well and what we want to keep. We then moved on to discuss some of the things that didn’t work so well, and areas to improve on. Everyone’s input is valued - whether you’ve been to one, two, ten, NYAs, or maybe you haven’t been before. Regardless, all ideas are considered and recorded. By working together and hearing everybody's thoughts, we were able to draw the best of what NYA has to offer and use this to look at how we best continue this. Later sessions looked at discussion topics, social activities and worship, so by the end of the Sunday evening, we had a complete programme set.

For the discussion topics, we received input from the councils and committees of the Church. This allowed us to connect with the wider Church, and for the wider Church to connect with us. It's always interesting to look at what the councils have to offer and to see how they want to engage with us in their work. Using their ideas as a base, we then took the topics we felt were most relevant and interesting to us, and the ones we felt we can best contribute to, and formed a shortlist. Some of the ideas we listed as potential discussions, others we decided would make great workshops. Thus, the programme we built is varied and offers something for everyone.

Aside from the planning itself, the weekend also comprises worship. Over the weekend a handful of young people led short informal worship sessions and, given the Year of Young People (YoYP) launch, it felt fitting to have the overarching theme of young people – enabling, encouraging and empowering one another to use our gifts in the Church. Worship in these settings is always powerful, particularly when led by our peers, and during the YoYP, it was a perfect example of young people sharing their gifts to celebrate God’s love, and our place in His world.
9.6 GA Reflections

9.6.1 Rachel Hunter (first time commissioner)

“I’m going to the General Assembly” is a phrase I heard often growing up within the CoF. Although not mentioned often, its existence was one which I was aware of. However, the importance of such a phrase was something I would not fully grasp until I myself experienced what it really meant to be at the General Assembly (GA).

As a first time delegate going to GA as a youth rep, it truly was an invaluable experience. The concept of church was often confined to the idea of a weekly visit to one building and the thought of church existing outside my local town, on a national level, was something which was hard to imagine. Having been an NYA delegate the two years previous, I had begun to see more of this new world. My eyes opened to the fact that church existed on a wider scale. Not only did the CoF have hundreds of lively and thriving congregations, but also that there were councils, committees and groups at the heart of the central church. I loved getting to know and understand the internal church and learning more about what goes on. Slowly you begin to feel part of something much bigger than a small local church.

GA is a very prestigious, organised, big event. The arrival of the First Minister and the Lord High Commissioner helped to emphasise the importance of what would be done that week. The amendments, counter motions and all other protocols became really exciting, looking at the key parts of the Blue Book and noting where the commissioners sought to bring change to what was proposed.

Although at first intimidating, the official nature of the GA was one of the reasons I enjoyed the week so much. All of the major issues the church is facing were being honestly and openly discussed and I was given the opportunity to watch it play out! The passion that the commissioners portrayed when they spoke about different issues was clear, not only highlighting the importance of giving a voice to the people, but also showing why it is so necessary that the church is constantly evolving, moving forward, reflecting and changing.

Some of the topics were hard hitting – emphasising the feeling of uncertainty which lies within the central church at this time. Seeing the rise and fall of the strategic plan definitely showed why the GA is so important. It holds the councils to account and forces radical action were it is needed. Although intense to watch, it was really exciting and I felt so privileged to watch such a raw moment. The same sex marriage discussion by the Legal Questions Committee was not only interesting from a sociological perspective, but also the emotional
stories told by commissioners really highlighted how influential a change in church law could be to so many peoples’ lives.

Although unable to vote, I never felt excluded. There was an all-round buzz and warmth towards young people throughout the week. Inclusion within the church is obviously something we should all strive for and I felt the GA was a great example of intergenerational success. Further, several young people stood up and spoke. Crucial points about the need for communion to be more accessible, the World Mission Council’s work and even a strong push for divestment from fossil fuels were made by youth delegates, the latter of which ended up leading to a vote. The voices of my follow youth reps were celebrated, not disregarded, and this was a crucial message which I believe was central to how much I enjoyed my time at GA.

Overall my experience at GA was one I won’t forget. I was exposed to the reality of the central church for the first time at that scale and I can honestly say I loved it. I was proud to be part of such a wonderful community where real issues were being addressed and not shied away from. I feel the local church often does not see the true successes of the wider church, and much of the hardship is faced without little positivity to coincide. However, I really felt that GA was a true celebration of the CofS; what it has achieved and what it can achieve.

9.6.2 Esther Nisbet (attended over seven General Assemblies)

When the General Assembly (GA) comes around, it is normally greeted with eye rolls and sighs at a long and (potentially) boring week filled with pomp, ceremony and lots of debate. You may have heard commissioner’s reports before that reflect this sentiment, but I’m going to give you a brief snapshot into the week of GA as experienced by the youth reps.

The GA is constituted on the third Saturday of May each year. However, a group of young people arrive on the Friday evening, some nervously for their first time, and others veterans (in which I include myself), to be introduced to the Assembly Halls and given a brief idea as to what to expect for the week. This gives enough time to begin to immerse and prepare for the coming week, which is sure to be full of new experiences, learning new words, and bringing an element of different perspective to the debates, furthering the work of the Church. I’ve been fortunate enough to attend at least seven GAs, each one bringing a different theme and area of understanding to my personal faith, as well as making me feel part of the CofS as a whole.

While the youth reps are obviously present within the Assembly Hall, I’m not sure how many commissioners are aware of how much preparation, prayer and diligent work goes into our
week. We begin at 7am with breakfast and devotions, then the morning session, afternoon session and sometimes even an evening session, are followed by an evening prep session for us to look at the programme for the following day. We then finish with a set of evening devotions that often end around midnight! The famous Blue Book has gained a reputation among the youth reps, with many of us vying to have read the most and able to discuss the issues in the most depth.

The GA is exhausting - it is long days focused on deep topics that require concentration and sometimes the need to return to Scripture (and often a dictionary!). However, it is also one of my favourite weeks of the year. Why? Because I never fail to leave invigorated. The atmosphere of being around people whose sole goal is to strive and further the Kingdom of Christ is uplifting and inspiring. It’s a time when important conversations are spoken, new concepts are thought of, and much reflection is had.

For anyone who believes GA business is boring, dry - or worse, unimportant – I challenge you: GA 2019 begins on Saturday 18 May. The public gallery awaits you!
10. Scottish Youth Parliament

Following an NYA discussion in 2010 around politics and engagement of faith, there have been two NYA representatives elected as members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs). Connor MacFadyen and Rebecca Craig have been our elected representatives for 2017-2019 and elections took place in March for the next pair of MSYPs for 2019-2021. As a result, Laura Asher will join Rebecca, who has been re-elected, to begin representing the CofS at the SYP when it meets for its first sitting of the new term in June 2019.

Connor has shared some of his experiences from the past year and has reflected on his time as an MSYP:

As MSYPs for the CofS, we represent the 50,000+ young people connected to the national church. This is not an easy task given we do not have contact with or are able to engage with the vast majority of them on a regular basis. Our jobs have also been challenging because we are often treated differently by other MSYPs as our posts are safeguarded due to us being a Voluntary Organisation. However, this has not stopped us from working hard and ensuring young people in the CofS are represented at the SYP.

Each MSYP is assigned to a committee and during our time as MSYPs, Rebecca and I have both have sat on the Justice and Social Work committees, while simultaneously aiming to improve relationships within the parliament between those of faith and those of no faith.

This year I had the privilege to serve as the Vice-Convenor of the Justice committee, which enabled the convenor and myself to take the thoughts of the working group with regards to biometric data and the age of criminal responsibility to the Justice Secretary at the Scottish Parliament. Overall this was an interesting and engaging experience.

I have also represented the Voluntary Organisations on the SYP’s Procedures Group since October 2017. This has been a fantastic opportunity to offer some education about the Church and its young people to parliament members.

Being an MSYP during the YoYP (2018) was a great experience and Rebecca and I made good use of every opportunity to raise the concerns of young people of faith and to highlight the NYA.

I have been incredibly blessed to be able to serve as one of the CofS’s MSYPs for these past two years. While it was deeply disheartening that MSYPs representing faith groups were treated with a sense of disdain when I was first elected, I am glad that attitudes are changing for the better. However, the lows do not outweigh the highs, as being an MYSP has offered me great insight into the world of politics at a radically changing time within secular society but also within the CofS.
We are both incredibly grateful for the support we have received during our term, and I wish every blessing to Laura and Rebecca and wish them well with the work streams that they will pursue throughout their terms.

To contact Laura and Rebecca with any questions or to arrange for them to speak to your Guild, congregation or other organisations, they can be contacted at the below email addresses:

Rebecca Craig: rebecca.craig.msyp@sypmail.org.uk

Laura Asher: laura.asher.msyp@sypmail.org.uk

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Keep your eyes open, hold tight to your convictions, give it all you’ve got, be resolute, and love without stopping.

1 CORINTHIANS 16:13-14
11. Conclusion

The NYA is something the Church should remain proud of. Young people from across the country (and beyond), attend the event in a bid to explore and deepen their faith, strengthen their connection to God, and to find fellowship among other young Christians in the Kirk. The NYA community becomes of great importance to the young adults who attend, and just as this community envelopes its members in love and care, it also provides delegates with an opportunity for their voices to be heard in the Church – one which is not only grasped, but cherished.

We often hear that we cannot be what we cannot see, so to be able to inspire change (and in many cases be that change) that we want to see in the Church at a local, regional and national level is crucial to young adults’ sense of belonging within the wider Church.

NYA 2019 will be held at Gartmore House in Stirlingshire from **16 - 19 August 2019** with discussions about Hate Speech, Missional Buildings and Testimony and Confirmation. It is open to all 17-25 year olds with a connection to the CofS with 135 places available.

[www.churchofscotland.org.uk/nya](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/nya)

**Moderator:** Tamsin Dingwall  
**Clerk:** Seonaid Knox  
**Youth Rep Team:** Rachel Billes, Fraser Borland, Hannah Dunlop, Nicola Forbes, Kasper Garnham, Shahrukh Gill, Amy Hannah, Rachel Hunter, Gemma King, Connor MacFadyen, Dana McQatar, Deborah Nicol, Esther Nisbet, Rebecca Pennykid, Bethany Pringle, Blythe Rodger, Tara Shannon, Natasha Scotland.
The National Youth Assembly is a platform for young adults to voice their opinions and actively participate in decision making within the Church of Scotland.

For all those aged 17-25 with a connection to the Church of Scotland.

Discussion topics:
- Hate Speech
- Missional Buildings
- Testimony and Confirmation

Venue: Gartmore House, Stirlingshire

Cost: £95pp

£55pp if from a priority area or requiring air travel.

All rates include full board and coach travel from Stirling. Limited discounts for funding are available, contact sfarrant@churchofscotland.org.uk

Booking: www.churchofscotland.org.uk/nya

closes 16th July 2019