

National Youth Assembly speech – General Assembly 2019

Ecclesiastes 3:9-13 challenges us when it says: “What do we gain from all our work? I know the heavy burdens that God has laid on us. He has set the right time for everything. He has given us a desire to know the future, but never gives us the satisfaction of fully understanding what he does so I realised that all we can do is be happy and do the best we can while we are still alive. All of us should eat and drink and enjoy what we have worked for. It is God’s gift.” No verse could be more appropriate to represent the year that the youth assembly and I have been through.

The National Youth Assembly gathered together for what is likely to be its penultimate year at Gartmore house. Between the 17th and 20th of August 2018, 80 delegates from across Scotland, England, Malawi and Jordan, including ecumenical delegates from the Scottish Episcopalian church, United reformed church and the Church of England, gathered together to worship, learn and discuss topics relevant to us. This year’s main topics were end of life issues, ecumenism and social media.

The first evening was filled with team bonding, worship and food. Closing the evening off we had Norman Smith, co-chair of the young people and church of Scotland working group explaining the options to replace the national youth assembly in the near future. This was an optional but very well attended discussion which was both insightful and emotional for many. Explaining the reasons for the change and the possible options for the future has allowed us as a group to process the feelings of denial, anger, acceptance and excitement together.

Following the weekend Seonaid, the clerk and I, alongside 18 youth reps, took forward and put into action what was discussed. Three sub-groups were formed each looking at a different topic. I would like to pay tribute to these youth reps as I now share some of the outputs of this work.

Our end of life issues group have made huge steps towards encouraging discussions around this difficult topic. They have worked with others from across the church to create a “conversations in grief” resource to be completed and published at a later date. They have also engaged in social media campaigns such as “Blue Christmas” providing a prayer video, and have contributed positive challenges for “Blue Monday”. Furthermore, after being inspired by Gail Taylor from child bereavement uk they started a campaign during March to encourage every congregation to raise £25 to mark the 25-year anniversary of the charity.

The group looking at Ecumenical relations has been working alongside the Ecumenical relations committee, and they are grateful for all the help and support that they have received from the staff and members of the committee over this year. They have also spent time communicating with sister denominations finding out about traditions and collecting testimonies which will be released in a COSY guide to Ecumenical relations at a later date. There has been a series of Good news stories being shared on our social media channels where we have highlighted local congregations who are doing ecumenism well. Co-chair of this group, Gemma King, also visited Strasbourg for the Ecumenical Youth council in Europe a gathering of young Christians from across 26 countries. During her visit she attended lectures, workshops and bible studies alongside others from a variety of backgrounds and Christian traditions.

Social Media was the third topic we looked at. The social media group have created a number of different videos. These videos include explaining what the church of Scotland communications team do. They have also created an ABC guide on how to use various social media platforms to promote your church and events. The main project that they have been working on is #iamachristianand, a campaign aimed at reducing the stigma Christians face online and in real life. Their work has inspired me at my own job as the youth worker at Callander kirk and has led me to work on a social media theme with my high school group in creating a "faithbook". This has proven very popular with the younger teenagers by giving them tools to manage and deal with social media once they decide it is appropriate, but most importantly it has given many the confidence to reduce their reliance on it. One of my young people now only uses 7 hours a week on social media, compared to 21 at the start of the project.

Throughout the year I have been privileged to visit and meet with many amazing and inspirational people. In September I attended the Guild annual gathering where I was so warmly welcomed and I would like to take this moment to thank them. The most influential visit over my year was meeting with the 2nd Linlithgow girls brigade to help them work towards their women of faith badge. Although I was asked to be an example of a woman of faith for these lovely and caring young women, I was the one learning about women of faith, I was especially encouraged and inspired throughout the year by their brigade leader Catherine McIntosh. Another woman of faith that I would like to mention a word of thanks to is Very Reverend Susan Brown for her kindness and joie de vie, despite cheating at our NYA challenge in the summer... I would also like to echo her request to support Someer and Areeb, having worked alongside Someer on the Young People and church of Scotland working group I have been utterly amazed at his strength during this tough time of uncertainty, continuing his commitment to the church and performing exceptionally well during his exams. He is an absolute credit to his parents, his church and to our community.

During this year I felt I was to be an example for others; however, it was me that was finding incredible examples across the church and being inspired to further my faith. The generosity of the team of youth reps who agreed to sleep in the park with myself and Seonaid in December and all those who sponsored us, led to us being one of the top 50 individual and group fundraisers which resulted in myself and Cameron, from the communications team, being invited to the celebratory dinner with guest speaker Malala Yousafzai. I want to take some time to thank some of those who have supported the work of the youth assembly, to all the guild members who have so warmly welcomed myself and fellow youth reps to various guild events throughout this year, to the council of assembly for again supporting and encouraging some of our youth reps at their September meeting, to Janet Foggie, Gail Taylor, Bryan Kerr and Graham Fender-Alison for working with our End of life issues group to help create the conversations in grief resource, to the ecumenical relations committee for working alongside our ecumenical group, I know they are amazing but I am so glad that you had the chance to experience their work and commitment also, to the communications team for all their positivity and encouragement along with helping to spread the word of both fundraising campaigns. And of course, to all those who sponsored us for sleep in the park and all who engaged with the £25 for 25 campaign. Your support not only means a lot to the youth assembly but also to all those that your donations will be helping. If you haven't had the opportunity to donate to the work of the youth assembly, next month a hardy bunch of us will be participating in tough mudder and would love to take your money, for a good cause of course.

Many young people who have attended NYA may find it hard to let go of all the experiences they have taken from NYA in its current form. But I hope I can speak for all about the excitement we now have for the further opportunities available to us and future generations of young people. If you have any members in your church between the ages of 17 and 25 please encourage them to consider getting involved and continuing their journey with Christ alongside us. This year the national youth assembly will be meeting in Gartmore between the 16th and 19th of August to discuss hate speech, missional buildings and testimony and confirmation. I am very excited to be handing the reigns over to Dana McQatar during this weekend and look forward to seeing the warmth and joy that she will lead the youth assembly with.

Finally, I'd like to take a quick moment to dedicate this speech to my daddy, who unfortunately passed away on January 29th, with this in mind I would like to extend my thanks to the national church for all the kind words and support that I have received, especially from my congregation and 121, but most importantly I want to thank all those from the youth assembly, you all truly share the love of God and shine the light of Christ, you are all an excellent example to the church. I am so insanely proud to have been

privileged to represent you all this year and I can't thank you enough for trusting me to do so.

Moderator, I would like to present the report of the National Youth assembly 2018.