

Joint report from the Guild and the National Youth Assembly on Inter-generational work in the church (No 14 in volume of reports)

Guild National Convener, Rosemary Johnston :

Moderator,

In 2015, the General Assembly instructed the Guild and the National Youth Assembly to work together and to bring a report to the Assembly of 2015 on intergenerational work in the church.

This proved, inevitably, to be a very complex and diverse area of work. Consequently, an interim report was presented at the 2016 Assembly.

Today, we present the final report of the joint working group and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the representatives of the Guild and the National Youth Assembly who have been involved in bringing the report to this stage.

Given the joint nature of the work, we feel that it would be appropriate for the report to be presented by two people who played leading roles in its preparation.

Therefore, I wonder if it would be possible to invite Mary Reid from the Guild and Naomi Dornan from the Youth Assembly to address the Assembly?

Mary Reid, Guild member of working group:

Moderator,

It's a great privilege and a joy to share in presenting this report to the Assembly.

That's largely because it's such a positive report – this is good news!

The first comment we want to make today relates to Paragraph 2 of the report, 'What **is** intergenerational work and ministry?' and the comment is this: You think you know what intergenerational means – but you don't!

Certainly that was true for me when we started this piece of work - 'Of course the Kirk is intergenerational,' I thought. 'Cradle to grave is what we do! We have everything from toddler groups to seated exercise classes, and on Sunday mornings we're all together in one building.'

Ah well, it transpires that that is '**multigenerational**' not **intergenerational**'- and that's not just playing with words!

There's a very real difference between people of all ages simply being present together (that's **multigenerational**) and interacting with one another in purposeful ways, doing and learning things together, learning from each other and, in the process, getting to know and respect each other – that's **intergenerational practice**.

And it's not just something that happens – intergenerational work takes a lot of planning and preparation.

Naomi Dornan, NYA member of working group:

When in the initial planning stages, one of the questions we considered as a working group was what makes intergenerational work **so** important, and why now more than ever. And it can be easily summed up with a tweet from Pope Francis; "The future of society requires fruitful encounter between young and old."

That's easy to say, with 140 characters being a great limiter, but what does it mean? Basically, no single generation can do all the work on their own. There's skills and expertise at all levels, and all age ranges. It is possible to learn from each other while working together. This is the aim of Intergenerational work and Ministry.

In the not so distant past, there were still whole family units living, studying, working and worshipping within the same parish – most probably, the parish of their ancestors. However, now, families are much more widely spread. It is not uncommon for said families to live, study, work and worship within different communities. This fracturing of family patterns affects all generations.

Intergenerational work and ministry can help to break down these boundaries in society, in the parish and in the lives of the individual. There are potential benefits across all levels but the most fundamental of all is the ability to embed this with the Gospel of love. By working together involving a host of age ranges and abilities which enables congregations to create a safe, welcoming and caring family environment for people to flourish.

Intergenerational work should start from the bottom up with local people first. This then would, could and definitely should have a knock on effect throughout Presbyteries and into the wider body of governance for the Church of Scotland. If we are doing this correctly, a diversity of age demographic should be active and apparent through all levels of Church life and governance.

With the potential future, we face as a Church, working intergenerationally could build solutions to the problems we are facing; that is why it's particularly important now.

To look deeper, we sought examples from other denominations and organisations – we were pleasantly surprised by the wide variety of examples already in existence – particularly from the Baptist Union of Great Britain, whose commitment to an intergenerational approach is shown through their 'Today... not tomorrow' resources.

We turned to the rest of the United Kingdom for examples of best practice; finding examples across the board, from the North to the South of England, and then to our Scottish Government who allocated vital funding to 'Generations Working Together' whose

objective is to resource, train and support any group interested in developing intergenerational work in Scotland.

And then it came to looking to the Church of Scotland. We did this by sending a survey out to every parish, and publicising it across our social media networks.

This yielded 50 responses – not a large number when you consider the potential, but the quality of response was outstanding. We were particularly struck by the significant number of those responses that came from Priority Areas. We were massively encouraged by the work already going on, and sincerely grateful to those that chose to share their stories with us – they were read with massive smiles.

While we saw strong examples of working intergenerationally, we were introduced to a variety of different approaches to explore this. Some, chose to start off small, with a few of their groups being explicitly intergenerational, others adopted the ‘we just ask everybody to come to everything!’ approach.

What we would stress, is that whatever approach suits the life of your congregation is the right one. The experience gathered from the survey indicated that there’s a necessity to build capacity for the undertaking of working intergenerationally – leaving it to one person can, quickly, become a burden.

When considering the wider extents of intergenerational ministry within the Church of Scotland, we were given examples of intergenerational worship – where, again, approaches varied. Some offered ‘whole church family’ services, providing experiences to meet the full family each week, others chose to focus these intensive worship spaces around key festivals or themes.

Mary Reid:

As you would expect, congregations developing intergenerational work and ministry face various challenges (I'm referring to paragraph 6 of the report), for example:-

coming up with imaginative ideas for activities that can be shared by different generations; finding suitable venues for events; persuading people that change can be a good thing; arranging times for planning, given the very different daily, weekly and annual schedules of the different generations.

It seems clear from our survey, however, that the challenges relate mainly to practical arrangements, and not to the intention of becoming more intergenerational.

We would want to stress, though, that congregations or Presbyteries planning intergenerational activities should seek guidance at an early stage from the Kirk's safeguarding service, for everyone's protection.

Some of our respondents expressed disappointment that successful intergenerational activities did not result in more people worshipping on Sundays (though some churches have grown in numbers through this approach).

I'd like to say upfront that our working group does not consider increased numbers in the pews to be the purpose of intergenerational work – we see its aim as being the strengthening of the bonds between members of the church family, and the extension of that loving relationship to the parish and the community. It seems to us that that's our Christian duty and responsibility – any increase in church attendance should be seen as a joyful bonus!

And, indeed, those who responded to our questionnaire experienced many 'joyful bonuses' arising from their intergenerational approach to work and worship. If you read nothing else in this report, read

Paragraph 7, quotes from real people in real parishes – it'll do your heart good!

In this connection, I should add that if you would like to get in touch with someone involved in one of the projects mentioned in our report, then Suzi Farrant, the Young People's Worker in the Mission and Discipleship office, may be able to help.

In the final paragraph of our report, Paragraph 8, we consider how intergenerational work and ministry might be further developed within the Kirk – and we certainly feel that it should be, because we believe that this approach has much to offer congregations throughout Scotland.

Good, professional training is available regarding intergenerational practice, for instance through the organisation, 'Generations Working Together', whose website also carries a very interesting list of sources of funding for projects of this nature.

In fact, there is plenty of information and support out there – we hope you will all want to find out more, and think more about this way of working, in relation to your own situation in your congregation, in your Presbytery, in the Council or Committee on which you serve.

The Guild and the National Youth Assembly have been greatly encouraged by the number of churches already moving towards a more intergenerational way of building the church family. Our hope is that this is something that will become embedded in the on-going life of the Church of Scotland.

Naomi Dornan:

Conclusion.

In closing, we go back to the beginning; after all, Julie Andrews told us, it's a very good place to start. We were tasked by the General

Assembly to prepare a report in relation to Intergenerational work and Ministry within the Church of Scotland, and we were struck by the joy of creating an Intergenerational group to do so. We have experienced many of the challenges the survey respondents encountered – we had to continually consider time, location and capacity. Each of us brought different circumstances to the table, but we learned quickly to be able to adapt to situations, last minute changes and still respond to one another in respect and in love. Our collective experience has been positive, we achieved what we set out to do and for that, in this instance, Intergenerational work within the Church has been a great thing. It has just been unfortunate that the generations have been polarised from the perspective of taking what the media would perceive to be the youngest and oldest groups within the church to compile this report. There are a multitude of generations missing in the middle.

Thankfully, the work we have seen through the survey respondents have confirmed to us that at a local level, much effort is being done to ensure all truly are welcome in this place.

Rosemary Johnston:

Moderator, I would repeat the thanks of the Guild National Council and the National Youth Assembly to those who have produced the report and to Mary and Naomi for their presentation.

I present the report and the move the Deliverance.