

Thank you, Moderator.

I'd like to present the report of the 2016 National Youth Assembly to the General Assembly.

The decision of topics for the National Youth Assembly each year is a thorough but very deliberate process. The strength of voice that we have to people across the Church of Scotland and also wider civic society, means that a fine balance must be struck between what is relevant and what is needed.

They are chosen by the young adults, the adults, attending the planning weekend, with suggestions and requests sent from councils and committees across the Church as well as individuals who are passionate about any given subject.

Our topics this year of Mental Health, Gender Justice and the Future of Ministry and Fresh Expressions are all both; very relevant and absolutely necessary discussions, today.

Our Mental Health does require as much focus as our physical health does, but is not given such. The way we do, but shouldn't, treat people based on their gender identity. And the future of this very Church, the way we interact with it, how it grows and how it shapes its ministry.

Before I attended my first National Youth Assembly in 2013 I was, in honesty, a little sceptical of not just the impact and power it could have but also the level at which the discussions would take place. That year led with a theme of identity. What it meant to be part of the Church of Scotland, to be Scottish and to be ourselves. With the, at the time, upcoming referendum on Scottish Independence these topics jumped out at me and formed part of my decision to attend the event as I'm sure was the case last year for many of our delegates.

Once I was there however, it was immediately clear why so many people enjoyed the event so much. Not only is it an opportunity to discuss church and social issues from a church perspective, when often we don't get to talk about them at all, it is also an opportunity to sometimes finally meet someone you strongly relate to. Having faith gives us strength, sharing faith builds our strength.

Our discussion on the Future of Ministry was wide in variety and deep in passion. We looked at the traditional role of a minister within the Church of Scotland and discussed what we like to see in them. A shining example, open minded, honest. These were three of such attributes looked for. We talked about new initiatives that could be possible within ministry as we look at our changing country, the idea of online church with input from the Very Reverend Albert Bogle as well as social media presence was one such example. It was also interesting to hear from our Ecumenical delegates who helped to provide insight to this topic as they do, on so many across the whole church.

Also raised, was that when we continue to talk about innovative new ideas and styles of worship we do not purely see these working instead of our current model, but rather working to compliment it. Ideas such as political hustings and interfaith dialogue were seen as positive new ways for the Church to engage with people. And it is important to look at it this way round. We live in a society where people are often unlikely to make the first step themselves, so we must take it, to them.

When discussing what could be done to promote and enable the ministry within the Church of Scotland, the overwhelming feedback was that engagement and opportunity from an early age is crucial. Normalising the role as such, and making it less intimidating would break down some of the barriers that some people perceive to be in the way, whether it is or not.

We also identified that through increasing our fresh expressions, we should not just look towards more people in our pews on a Sunday morning, but instead of a Church with increased engagement, passion and love for the Lord our God.

It is always a privilege of the National Youth Assembly's to be able to draw wisdom and knowledge from members and staff the length and breadth of our Church, such an example this year came when we invited Katherine Gilmour and Fiona Buchanan to provide input to our discussion on Gender Justice. For this, we did not just stick to the traditional discussion of the rank and privileges of being either male or female, instead we discussed wider issues of what it means to identify with a certain gender, separate to our biological sex, or not. It is important for us to recognise now, as we did at the Assembly, that some of the matter that we are discussing will be new to people, and that education is key in taking this forward.

During discussion, we looked at the different attributes that are stereotypically assigned to people, based on their sex. For example, that men are expected to suppress and hide their emotions, something I will come back to later. For the purposes of this report, I think it would be helpful for me to give you two definitions of identities seen as non-traditional. Gender non-conforming is used by individuals who do not identify directly with either the male or female gender identities and who are referred by they or them, instead of he or she. A second example is transgender, while this is more commonly understood and used, it is perhaps useful to still explain it, a transgender female is someone who was assigned male at birth, but now identifies as female or alternatively a transgender male is someone who was assigned as female at birth and now identifies as a male. This is a complex subject and if you want to know more I would advise firstly referring to both our report and supplementary report.

We continued on to discuss gender justice in the traditional sense also, and how we treat either males or females differently. This was a passionate but respectful debate but did not avoid discussion on powerful statements. When asked if "Gender stereotypes can have detrimental and damaging effects on both physical and mental health" 89% agreed. And, in another example, when asked if "Gender stereotypes can lead to domestic and sexual violence against men not being taken seriously", 95% of delegates agreed. It was raised that the media has a large amount of influence over how we are informed of traditional gender roles but does not use this power wisely and also that women suffer negatively to a greater extent from these roles than men do and I would commend the World Mission report from this year for further information on this.

In my eyes, our most important topic of the year for us, was Mental Health. This issue which affects one in every four people in our country is all too consistently dismissed, and people suffering from poor mental health not taken seriously enough. We need a clear direction of change in the way we talk about this topic in all situations, and the Church is absolutely one of the places where discussion should and need to happen. At the Youth Assembly last year, delegates sat and poured out their hearts on a piece of paper, talking about their experiences of mental health within the Church. We have collated these responses and published them in an online publication which you can access through the Church of Scotland website. The problem of Mental Health should not be underestimated in any way. Nothing kills more young men in Scotland than suicide does. Nothing. No accidents, no cancer, no acts of violence and no disease kills more young men than suicide. Everybody has mental health and it is important we are careful with this language. When you suffer, you suffer from poor mental health, not mental health. When you are doing well, you have good mental health, not none. It is an issue that is as prevalent amongst the Youth Assembly as it is the rest of the country. Of our delegates, 40% had sought professional help for their mental health. Not just suffered from poor mental health, this figure was 80%, but felt that it needed treatment and sought this professionally. 16% of our delegates had been prescribed anti-depressants within the 12 months leading up to the National Youth Assembly last year. This picture is reflected across our congregations and communities throughout this country and around the world. We need to wake up to this issue, and finally start to put our mental health alongside our physical health, and we look forward to working with Crossreach in raising awareness of mental health issues and raising funds for the many wonderful projects they run throughout this country helping people young and old. This will be done through the Grey Cakes baking campaign, and what could be easier Moderator, than baking a cake.

This year the online presence of the National Youth Assembly has continued to grow through social media with many campaigns and additional work going on throughout the year. The Moderators' Twitter account increased its following by over 20% with positive levels of engagement throughout the year. On Facebook we undertook three major campaigns of posting throughout the year increasing engagement, and sharing the word of Jesus Christ online in a format we had done before, but not to that extent. From the first Sunday in Advent

we posted a daily reflection, with a different youth rep each day, joined occasionally by other friends of NYA, talking about a certain theme of advent and its meaning for them personally, this culminated in our first ever Facebook live post, a new way we used to further share the good news. This period of posting had a combined reach of over 33,000 proving extremely popular with followers old and new.

This was followed during Lent as people from the wider NYA circle reflected on words identified at the NYA planning weekend as those key to what NYA meant to them. From Love and Faith, to Affirming and Rejoicing. The words which inspire us are varied and vast but their meaning deeply personal. Just over 40,000 people were reached during the period of Lent and I can only view that as a great success of spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. Finally, we posted throughout Mental Health Awareness Week which ran from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> of May. Focussing on raising awareness; creating a safe community; and helping those in our congregations, including our ministers. We hope this has helped in some way to further the cause of a better approach and awareness of mental health issues.

The National Youth Assembly this year, will take place from the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> of July again in Gartmore House and booking is of course, already open. The topics we will be discussing this year are; Young People, with the upcoming year of the young person, Interfaith, and the priorities of the Church of Scotland. I look forward to passing on the role of Moderator to my successor Robin and the Clerk Catrina.

I'd like to extend a vote of thanks to Lyndsay Kennedy, this years' Clerk of the National Youth Assembly. Not just from my own perspective but also from the wider National Youth Assembly. NYA has been part of Lyndsay's life, and Lyndsay part of NYAs' life for 10 years. She is a prime example of the prospects that can come from the event as she attends this General Assembly as a corresponding member as part of the panel on review and reform, as well as being an elder within her congregation.

I'd like to extend my thanks to a number of other people from throughout my year. I'd like to thank the youth reps for their work and commitment throughout the year. The work we have done would never be possible without

them and my thanks to them are sincere. I'd like to thank, in particular, Fiona Marshall and Naomi Dornan for their work over the past two years as part of the joint group between the Guild and ourselves on intergenerational work and to thank the Guild for working with us. I'd like to thank Rachel Walker for her work over the past two years to sit, along with myself, as the NYA representatives within the Scottish Youth Parliament. I'd like to thank everyone who has extended a hand of welcome to me throughout the year to groups, Guilds and meetings across the country. In addition, the congregation of St Columba's Budapest for their warmth and hospitality when I travelled amongst the delegation for the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary for the Scots Mission there. I'd like to thank everyone else who has helped me throughout the year, encouraged me and helped me to where I am today and of course my brother Alistair, my mum and dad and my wonderful girlfriend Gigha.

Moderator I'd like to close with this.

Talk to the person on their own,  
Talk to the person you have not known.  
The word hello can be enough  
When the world around them, seems so tough.

Don't be afraid of the subject of mental health, normalise it, and together we can fight towards removing stigma and helping the suffering of so many.

Moderator I present the report of the National Youth Assembly. Thank you.