



### **Methodist Recorder article by Martha Rand, Youth Rep to Methodist Conference**

I felt somewhat apprehensive as I stood on a crowded train on my way to Cliff College, on Friday 25 January. I was on my way to my first Rep weekend and I knew that I would be the youngest Rep by a reasonable amount. At 16 I was only old enough to be a Rep by a few weeks, and most roles have a minimum age of 18. It was my first solo train journey with changes and I was stuck on a train half the size it was meant to be in Friday evening rush hour. In the large amount of rail travel I have done since I have learned that this is all too common.

I soon learnt that, at least with regard to being a Rep, I had nothing to be worried about. On my arrival I was welcomed into an amazing team, including both long-serving and first-time Reps, ranging in age from myself at 16 up to 24-years-old. We are led by the courageous (now outgoing) Youth President Jasmine Yeboah and looked after by the ever-patient Meg.

Now, 6 months later, I have completed the main part of my role. I am a Conference Rep and therefore attended Methodist Conference from 30 June to 4 July – and it was an amazing, life changing experience. This was through, firstly, being able to participate in the discussions of the God in Love Unites Us report and, secondly, the opportunity to meet other young Methodists.

I was immensely proud to be part of the historic decision to move towards allowing Methodist same-sex marriage, as well as changing the Church's guidance on cohabitation and deciding to create resources to help those who are going through divorce. I was glad to have the opportunity to speak on the report and have been overwhelmed by the reaction to my speech. For those who haven't heard it, my main point was about young people. I recognise that there is as much diversity of opinion in the youth of the Church as in the rest of the Church on these challenging issues. However, I am yet to meet a young person outside the Church who understands why we are even talking about it. I have a friend who is in a same-sex relationship at the moment, and no one at school treats her relationship any differently to a mixed-sex relationship, some find it more problematic that they are in different year groups!

These thoughts were confirmed when I returned home, joyful at the results of the votes, only to find my non-Christian friends decidedly unenthusiastic about the news. I would not argue that the Church should always be dragged along with the wider society, but I feel that, while this decision may cause us to lose some who cannot

support same-sex relationships, we may see many more, especially young people, who don't want to be part of an organisation that is seen to be homophobic. I also mentioned the importance of considering different historical contexts when we read scripture, as well as the imperfection of translation.

Becoming a Rep and going to Methodist Conference has also allowed me to meet other young Methodists, which has been very uplifting for me. Since about the age of four I have been the oldest young person in the two different churches I have attended in that time. This has given both challenges and blessings. Being the oldest I have often felt the provision for children and youth in church to be a little childish, and I am now finding myself unsure what is expected of me as I move between being a child and being an adult in the church. However, having no one my age has meant that I have forged valuable intergenerational ties, as well as giving me more freedom to choose how and when to make the steps towards confirmation, and towards leadership roles at church.

So, what next? I am currently awaiting GCSE results and hope to begin A-levels in Maths, Physics, Chemistry and Further Maths in September. I will conclude my current Rep role by helping to hear the voices of children and young people at 3Generate in November and I hope I can continue to be a Rep next year, whether as a Conference Rep or in a different role, as it has been such a fulfilling experience to me.