

17. Methodist Youth Assembly 2009

Basic Information

Title	Youth Assembly Report
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Status of Paper	Information
Resolution/s	Resolutions are to be found at the end of the Report

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	An Evaluation of Methodist Youth Assembly 2009 A report of outcomes of Youth Assembly 2009
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Numbers, demographics and logistics of Youth Assembly 2009 highlighted.• Resolutions from young people at Youth Assembly to be considered by the Conference.
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	www.childrenandyouth.org.uk www.methodistyouthassembly.org.uk

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Introduction

1. In 2009 the Methodist Church effected changes to the existing 'Youth Conference' format, so that this event reflected the values of a Youth Assembly, as outlined in Standing Order 250(2)

■ *"The Youth Assembly exists to provide an opportunity within the Methodist Church to hear and be informed by young people."*
■
2. The first Youth Assembly took place from 13th – 15th November 2009 at Ushaw College in Durham. The event was planned by young people, (from across the Connexion) who volunteered to be facilitators of the business of Youth Assembly, and by a Planning group (comprising of young people and adult volunteers) from the Newcastle District who took care of the logistics and worship; and was supported by Children and Youth Staff from the Discipleship and Ministries Cluster of the Connexional Team.
3. The following report evaluates that first assembly. It includes feedback from Methodist Church staff and volunteers, and the comments made by young people.

Evaluation

4. Ushaw College was well liked by the young people attending and there was much positive feedback. In seeking a venue for 2010 the aim will be to find somewhere that is good in

terms of health and safety and risk assessments, and to accommodate young people in groups of four or six, dividing older and younger members. This is preferable for safeguarding and social reasons. The venue for Youth Assembly 2010 should be large and exclusive, with importance placed on an area for worship, a lounge area, and outdoor space.

5. Seven different sessions on various subjects were held, led by trained young facilitators. The facilitators had attended two previous training events run for them by Dynamix, an outside agency specialising in participation techniques. The subjects of these sessions were chosen by the Youth President following her travels around the Connexion listening to the needs and concerns of young people.
6. The sessions were held in an interactive and imaginative way, designed to allow all young people to participate. The facilitators drew out the following challenges from the sessions:

Challenges for the individual
Challenges for the districts, circuits,
or churches or the Connexional
Team
Challenges for the Conference to
consider.

These challenges were presented to all the young people on the Sunday morning of Assembly where they voted to accept or reject them.

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7. The feedback from young people indicates that overall, the Youth Assembly was successful in allowing young people to share their views and communicate these to Conference. There were a few comments from young people that 'the voting felt like primary school' and 'ages 11–23 is a vast age group', which sometimes made serious discussions more difficult. It was considered that the event may work even better if age groups were divided so that young people were able to work at the most appropriate level.
 8. Of the young people that were surveyed, 62% rated the choice of topics 'good or excellent', and 55% rated the facilitation good or excellent. One individual commented that, *'the sessions worked out very well, I saw young people who in the past had been overwhelmed by the thought of standing up in a big conference hall talking in front of 200 people, come out of themselves and add to the valuable discussions that took place'*.
 9. Members felt that the sessions themselves varied significantly in quality, but that their overall success could be attributed to the contributions of the planning team and the training of facilitators by Dynamix. One member said *'the training and input from Dynamix was great and helped us a lot and without them the sessions wouldn't have been as good as they were.'*
 10. The young people requested that topics be published ahead of the Youth Assembly, so that they can consider topics fully and bring to the Assembly the viewpoints of young people in their churches.
 11. 92% of young people when asked what the purpose was of the Youth Assembly agreed that it was an "opportunity for them to influence the decisions made within the church", and did not see its function as primarily social. 4% of members expressed concern that their opinions were entertained but not fully valued, and that the issues discussed were limited by the organisational constraints of the Youth Assembly. Several young people also requested a chance to present the most pertinent issues directly to the adults in the church.
- Membership, attendance and representation at the Youth Assembly**
12. The membership at the Youth Assembly 2009 in accordance with Standing Order 250

“(3) Membership of the Youth Assembly in any Connexional year is open to any young person involved in the life of the Methodist Church and aged 13 years or over, but under 24 on the first day of the Youth Assembly.”
 13. When asked whether the cut-off age for Youth Assembly would be better were it lowered to 19, 86% voted

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against this decision, indicating that this is still a necessary medium through which Methodists up to age 23 can express themselves.

- 14 Standing Order 250 (4) states that *“Each home District shall elect annually in accordance with Standing Order 417A two persons to be members of Youth Assembly who are members in the District and eligible for membership of the Youth Assembly under clause (3) above.”*
- 15 Of the 31 districts in the United Kingdom, 23 districts were officially represented at the Youth Assembly. This was made possible by the pooled fare system, which ensured that attendance was an equal opportunity for every district. There is no correlation between districts that didn't attend and the distance to the venue, which proves that the pooled fare system is effective.
- 16 In 2010, District Chairs and Secretaries have been asked to identify their District Representatives at the April/May Synod Meeting, and to book places for them following it. The remaining places can then be offered to other young people wishing to attend.
- 17 Standing Order 250 (5) states that *“The Youth Assembly may submit to the Methodist Conference a report (which may include resolutions) on any connexional subject. This shall be printed in the Agenda or otherwise circulated to the Conference and shall*

become part of its business.” The resolutions made by young people this year can be found in a later section of this report. One member expressed concern that “Login” facilitators for the sessions at the Youth Assembly are responsible for the final resolutions that are sent to the Conference, yet they are not democratically elected. It is hoped that if the training of facilitators is standardised and the resolutions sent to the Conference are based on votes from Logins, young people will feel that they have been fairly represented in future.

- 18 Standing Order 250 (6) and (7) state that

“(6)(a) The Youth Assembly shall also elect the Youth President Elect, who will become the Youth President from the start of the next connexional year.

(b) The persons eligible to be elected shall be those who have registered in accordance with the procedure laid down by the Youth Assembly, their intention to attend the Youth Assembly at which the election is to take place.

(7) The members of the Youth Assembly appointed under clause (4) above shall elect four members of the next Methodist Conference who are members of the Methodist Church and are 13 years or over, but under 24 on the first day of the Youth Assembly. They shall also nominate two representatives, similarly qualified, to be appointed by the Conference as members of the Methodist Council.”

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The Youth Assembly 2009 elected Pete Brady as Youth President and Christy-Anna Briggs as Youth President-elect.

The Assembly elected its President and three other representatives to represent young people at the 2010 Methodist Conference, namely

Neil Bolus
Reuben Collings
Simon Pillinger

John Colenutt was nominated to be appointed by the Conference as a member of the Methodist Council for one year.

- 19 Young people requested that in future voting be made more accessible and clearer. It is therefore planned that an electronic ballot system be introduced. The process will be carefully planned in association with the Youth President (Pete Brady) and Connexional Staff, and explained in detail to members. This has been costed in the budget for 2010.

Demographics

20. In total 208 young people attended Youth Assembly 2009, compared to 131 members attending Youth Conference in 2008. The Children and Youth team feel that this difference is largely down to the increased encouragement placed on districts to send representatives, the word of mouth of previous attendees, and

the extension of invitations to Youth Groups as well as church members.

21. In terms of diversity, young people with a variety of backgrounds and self-understandings were represented at the Assembly, although a detailed survey of how members described themselves in terms of ethnic origin and other matters was not undertaken.
22. It had been predicted that there would be an attendance of approximately 150 members based on previous years and early bookings, however the event actually accommodated 58 additional members. As many members as possible were accommodated, but the overbooking resulted in significant additional costs.
23. In 2009 Youth Assembly cost 28% more than the amount budgeted. This was the result of some extra initial planning costs such as facilitator training, however much of the additional expenditure was the result of overbooking, and could be avoided in future with better organisation. It is predicted that in 2010–11 we can make a 31% reduction on the budget spent in 2009–10.
24. When asked if there was anything they wanted included in this report to the Conference regarding Youth Assembly the following comments were made.

'YA is a truly inspirational event that left me feeling spiritually refreshed and

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enthused to include God in every part of my life – please continue to make it happen for people in the years to come.'

'I found it a really good and empowering experience and being able to be part of the organisation of the event was great. I came away being very enthused and inspired.'

'Youth Assembly is a fantastic event and brings so many likeminded young people together. The format this year I think is the best so far and I hope it continues similarly in future. It was a brilliant weekend and really strengthened a lot of people's faiths I think.'

'Thank you for the last nine years that I have attended youth conference/ assembly and met all the wonderful people that I have met and grown to love. This fellowship has enabled me to become closer to God and grow greatly in my faith. Thank you for the opportunities to express my opinion freely and get important issues sent as resolutions to 'big conference'. I shall watch with anticipation how future youth assembly members are encouraged to have greater input into the way our future church is shaped. Many thanks.'

Outcomes from the Youth Assembly

25. At the Youth Assembly the young people discussed various issues in smaller groups before voting on some of the key issues to be brought to the

Conference as resolutions. Below are the areas of discussion and the main points discussed.

Vocation

26. Members at the Youth Assembly concluded that a vocation is a "calling" to any form of work not just ministry. People can be "called" into any form of work.

The Youth Assembly would like the Conference to investigate a wide range of vocational opportunities for young people, and then to look at ways of communicating and delivering these opportunities to young people in ways that are direct and youth friendly (e.g. through Facebook).

See resolution 17/2

Self Esteem

27. In Britain today many young people struggle to believe that they can be accepted and loved 'warts and all'. Our competitive market-place society only allows for a small number of winners while losers, whether those laughed at on "The X Factor" or those who are too short, too plain, too poor, too different or too stupid, are left to ponder their value.

Whilst there is no overt recommendation concerning self-esteem coming from the Youth Assembly this year, members were keen to raise this issue with the Conference because it defines in

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large part what it feels like to be a young person in Britain today. Whilst this is not just an issue for young people, the Assembly believes that there is tremendous value in raising the issue of self-esteem from a young person's perspective. A genuine understanding and acceptance of the importance of self-esteem needs to be embedded within the Methodist Church in Britain in order that future plans and strategies can be informed, relevant, and brave.

You and your rights

28. At the Youth Assembly members explored what their rights are as young people. Discussions ranged from talking about existing relationships locally with police officers to speaking out ecumenically about stereotypes. The Youth Assembly would like to encourage the Methodist Church to continue being an advocate for young people. They would like the Church to stand up for the rights of young people, and to recognise that young people of all kinds are part of the body of Christ.

God and me

29. In depth conversations took place regarding the validity of the Bible and the process that brought the books of the Bible into their current format. Young people asked for and got input into this session from members of the Law and Polity and the Faith and Order Committees. Young people spoke about their feelings

of being unheard by their churches, and discussed the need for youth participation to be more than just a "project" but to become integral to the life of the Church. Young people requested that the Youth President role be reviewed, and this review published. They made clear that they valued this role and felt it had delivered more than just a figurehead. The Assembly recommended that the YPS Reference Group review the role of the Youth President.

Violence

30. Youth Assembly explored people's own experiences or encounters with violence. They flagged up that, regardless of the media's representation, the majority of crimes committed come from people over the age of 18, yet it is "Young People" who are often branded as the problem.

The members of the Youth Assembly would like the Conference to agree to look into creating safe places in which young people can get off the streets and be able to talk about local issues that are particular to them. They would like to encourage churches to look outside their buildings in order to engage people who are hanging about in their localities and to work with them in order to reduce the threat of violence towards young people. The Youth Assembly also commended the work of Street Pastors. Youth Assembly would encourage people across the connexion to pray for

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peace and an end to violence and to challenge the stereotypes in their everyday lives.

See resolution 17/3

Sex And Sexuality

31. The members of the Youth Assembly discussed sexuality, including the inclusion of homosexual and bisexual persons within the Church. They welcomed the chance to talk about every area of this complex topic openly. They asked for and received input from the President of the Conference, David Gamble, on the subject. They felt the subject of sex and sexuality was not often dealt with by their churches in such an honest way. They felt that last year's Conference had listened to their views. They felt that, as young people, they had something to offer the Church in arriving at a greater understanding of this subject in a twenty first century context. This fulfils the recommendation from Conference 2009.

The Assembly would ask the Methodist Council to work with young people to produce information to advise members of the Church regarding the issue of cohabitation.

See resolution 17/4

Equality and Diversity

32. The Youth Assembly had a wide ranging discussion on this issue and concluded that older and younger generations should be encouraged to value each other more. Members of the Assembly recognised that miscommunication can occur between the generations and pledged to attempt to engage with older church members when possible. The Youth Assembly spent some time discussing the possibility of organising a day to celebrate "diversity within church". They would like to encourage local churches to think about this idea as a possibility. Young people felt the Methodist Church should be a place which encourages the celebration of diversity, rather than stifle it in the name of political correctness.

The Youth Assembly would ask the Conference to direct the Methodist Council to develop more contemporary forms of training for preachers in order to develop preachers' understanding of the contemporary context in which young people now find themselves.

See resolution 17/5

*** RESOLUTIONS

17/1. The Conference receives the Report.

17/2. The Conference directs the Methodist Council to investigate a wide range of vocational opportunities for young people; to explore ways of communicating

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and delivering these opportunities to young people that are direct and youth friendly; and to report on progress to the Youth Assembly (noting that this might not be possible until Youth Assembly 2011) and to the Conference of 2012.

- 17/3. The Conference encourages local churches to engage people on the streets in order to reduce the threat of violence towards young people; and affirms and encourages the work of Street Pastors.**
- 17/4. The Conference directs the Methodist Council to work with young people to produce information that will advise members of the Church regarding the issue of cohabitation.**
- 17/5. The Conference directs the Methodist Council to develop more contemporary forms of training for preachers in order to develop preachers' understanding of the contemporary context in which young people now find themselves.**