

## **Diocesan Synod – Saturday 17 May 2025**

### **Bishop Martyn's Presidential Address**

There's been quite a bit in the press recently on what some have termed "a quiet revival". Research among young people shows that they are open to faith in a new way. The [Bible Society](#) has suggested that there has been a significant increase in young men attending churches and exploring faith, as well as a significant increase in the number of people buying Bibles.

Our own Statistics for Mission show an overall increase in numbers attending on Sundays (we're not yet back to 2019 levels but there has still been a significant increase over the past year). And anecdotally, this Easter saw many of our churches full in a way that hasn't happened for a long time.

Our Resourcing Churches programme which monitors numbers very closely, has shown that there have been 750 new disciples since the programme began – some in the Resourcing Churches themselves (all parish churches) and some in their church plants on new housing estates. This is a cause for real celebration and thanksgiving to God.

Additionally, in my last few Sunday visits to parishes, I have met a number of young adults who have just turned up at our churches. They have seen something on the internet which sparked their interest, and they have decided to visit their local church as a result. The fact that this digital connection was translated into actually visiting a church in person is another cause for us to wonder at what God is doing.

Lamorna Ash in her new book *Don't Forget We're Here Forever: A New Generation's search for Religion*, spent a year interviewing Christians about how they found faith. She herself has very little Christian background, but in the course of her visits to Iona, Walsingham, YWAM and a central London Anglican church, she found herself strangely drawn to faith in its many varieties of expression. It's a beautiful description – I highly recommend it.

So, something is happening among Gen Z and Gen A (born since 2000). Many of them are the first in their families to explore faith – their parents are not interested - and therefore the question for us is whether we will welcome them and be open to the challenge they will bring us?

This is why one of our strategic priorities is [intergenerational](#) churches – and one of our specific aims is to have an intergenerational hub in each Minster Community.

We've chosen the name "intergenerational" deliberately. It's about a move from mono-generational (many of our churches today) to multigenerational (children and young people (CYP) present but no interaction) to cross-generational (occasional spaces to intersect) to intergenerational (default is that we do this together) - very similar to the intercultural journey where people of different cultures interact and learn from each other.

In our diocese, we are blessed with 97 schools. All of them are keen to work with churches. But as I have suggested many times before, this cannot just be about clergy going into school. It requires people of all generations mixing and learning together.

Last week, I was visiting Blackburn Diocese as part of the 30k new children and youth ministers project that I chair. They have received Diocesan Investment Programme money for work with CYP and so we met with Rachel Gardner (Youthscape and regular speaker at conferences). She and her husband work in a context of high deprivation and high stress, and she spoke to us powerfully of how CYP need family and intergenerational support. They have been firm in their intention to ensure that

CYP are welcome at everything in the church, that they are involved in everything and not just performing!

I was struck by Rachel's comment that CYP want to be with adults. She told the story of a teenager who had suffered a bereavement – when they came to church, they went to sit next to a 90-year-old. Rachel was a bit concerned but then she saw the teenager laying their head on the shoulder of the 90-year-old. Afterwards, she spoke with the older lady and asked what she had said. "I told him that I had lost my parents, my husband and several close friends. It's horrible – but I got through it with Jesus."

Rachel put it very powerfully – we want the 70-year-old to be able to close their eyes during the intercessions in church and think about the teenager they chatted to earlier on Sunday. Can we say that of our churches?

So, our hope for intergenerational hubs is not only that they will have a skilled employed minister to enable ministry with CYP, but that they will enable people of all generations to minister to one another.

In part, this will mean a focus on volunteer development, and there are three parts to this:

1. Discover volunteers – a bit like finding buried treasure - they may not be the obvious people in the obvious places. They may work at school, may be on the edge of church, may be the 18-year-old still working out what they want to do with life; may be the 70-year-old with years of experience as parent and grandparent.
2. Develop volunteers – there is training on offer to help with this eg Youthscape Essentials (all round training for every volunteer youth leader)
3. Deploy and support volunteers - released to do work. And we have a low-risk appetite when it comes to safeguarding; but a high-risk appetite when it comes to taking on responsibility; trying new things; being stretched.

So, I'm talking about a move from growing big youth groups to growing life-long disciples. I'm taking about CYP leading church services; CYP leading lunch clubs at school, leading collective worship – a move from clergy leading collective worship to clergy enabling CYP to lead collective worship.

This is a moment of great opportunity for the church. God is moving in our nation – particularly among a younger generation. Let's work with God in this new movement.