

2003 'Reaching a New Generation'



Newtownbreda (St. John's) Presbyterian Church
Youth Strategy Document

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Introduction

This paper seeks to express the vision and goals of the youth ministry of Newtownbreda Presbyterian and will include a re-focussed vision and some background as to how and why the document has come about. It then seeks to outline the values which underpin our work, clarify our goals and the objectives for achieving these. This document builds on the quality work going on at the moment and provides a focus for future work of excellence and innovation which will extend us into new fields.

The final document will include an action plan to map out the actions required to achieve the goals and appendices of research information relevant to the process.

This process was initiated by the Kirk session by commissioning the youth subcommittee to draw up a vision and strategy for the youth ministry of the church. This subcommittee is made up of Johnny Browne, Vilma Patterson, Raymond McNeill, John Peacock and Jim McDowell.

This strategy is part of an ongoing process but it is our aim that the goals outlined can be achieved in the period September 2003 - August 2006.

Target Groups

We have clearly identified five groups of people whom this strategy will enable us to engage with effectively:

- Our own church young people;
- Friends of our church young people;
- Community young people who come to the organisations in the church;
- Community young people who are not currently involved;
- Families of all of the above.

Vision

The Work of Newtownbreda (St. John's) Youth ministry will be guided by the following vision:

Newtownbreda's vision is of a community where young people are inspired by the Gospel and are welcomed and included in the family of faith

Background

The following information provides an overview of the youth ministry in Newtownbreda as it currently stands:

Youth organisations

There are currently 20 different affiliated organisations working with young people in Newtownbreda Presbyterian. These range from the Sunday morning crèche for the very young to Amiche for those 18+.

According to information supplied to the Youth Council, there are currently 73 leadership roles required to run these organisations. There are 56 different leaders, 53 of whom are members of the church, carrying out these roles. 11 of these leaders work with more than 1 organisation.

These 56 voluntary leaders are serving 170 young people (24 young people attend more than 1 organisation). 82 (48%) of these young people are from families outside the church.

Youth Council

Newtownbreda youth council was established in June 2000 to pool the resources of the youth organisations and the church and to have a co-ordinated approach to our youth work in Newtownbreda. The youth Council carried out a S.W.O.T. (Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities & threats) analysis of all the youth organisations in the church and this forms part of the background to this report.

Youth worker

As a result of the 'Towards 2005' report, Newtownbreda took the decision to employ a youth worker. Our current youth worker, Jim McDowell, is the third person to hold this position. Jim was employed in January 2002 to 'develop relationships with and guide the young people of the church' and 'to research ways of meeting the needs of young people in the community'. Jim is employed for 10 hours per week but works much longer hours than this fulfilling these objectives.

Facilitator

We have been glad of the guidance of Mr Stephen Turner, Director of YMCA Ireland, to facilitate the youth subcommittee in the production of this strategy. Stephen has a long background in secular and Christian youth work and is well respected by many across the youth work field. He is currently a member of Granshaw Presbyterian Church.

Challenges of current & recent work in Newtownbreda

Newtownbreda has struggled with many of the same issues as other churches over the past few years.

- There is a completely different culture in the young people who attend church and those whom the church would endeavour to work with in the community. Thus it is increasingly difficult to work with these two subsets in a 'youth club' style setting.
- Secondly, young people today are highly sophisticated, with high expectations, and with plenty of choices of what to do with their time and talent. They will not automatically feel loyal to the church.
- Thirdly, Newtownbreda has suffered from the phenomenon where young people go to England or Scotland to study at 18 and either do not return to Belfast or if they do, they do not re-engage with the church. This has created a 'missing generation' of 25-40 year olds and subsequently a shortage of people with the skills and maturity to lead in the youth organisations.

Perceived Challenges of The Years ahead in Society

The following are examples of some of the perceived changes which we foresee impacting young people and the church over the next three years:

- Society will become even more secular;
- Technological advances will create an even greater educational divide;
- Churches will face a reduction in both financial and human resources and will be forced to work more closely together;
- Society will become more diverse with more ethnic minorities;
- Young people's spirituality will be 'messy' as they deal with issues such as homosexuality;
- There will be increasingly complicated family relationships resulting in young people with less self-esteem;
- There will be a greater awareness of ecological issues.

Our underlying principles & values

In order for our youth work to be effective we believe it must be underpinned by the following key values:

- We believe the church needs to be at the centre of the community;
- We need to be encouraging and inspiring our church young people (regardless of the stage they are at in their faith journey);
- The Church needs to be welcoming, serving and including all young people;
- It needs to be a place of fun, fellowship and friendship that supports and values the whole family;
- We need to be bringing the relevance of the gospel to young people and building relationships and partnerships within the community.

Our Goals

Having assessed the needs of the young people in our youth groups and having looked at the overall development of the church, the following goals have been identified as priorities for the youth ministry.

1. **Leadership:** To create a co-ordinated approach to leadership development.
2. **Growth:** To develop innovative methods of spiritual growth and discipleship.
3. **Co-operation:** To build better connections between the youth organizations themselves and between them and the church.
4. **Partnership:** To work in partnership with the local community.
5. **Outreach:** Devise tailored programmes appropriate to the personal development needs of young people.
6. **Welcome:** Create a safe and welcoming environment for all young people, suitable for befriending and the building of personal relationships.

Goal One - Leadership

'To create a co-ordinated approach to leadership development'

'Remember the leaders who first taught you the word of God. Consider their way of life and imitate their faith'. Hebrews 13:7

When looking at the development of youth ministry, it is obvious that the quality of leadership is an essential pre-requisite.

This has been prioritised as a very important goal and will require careful management and resourcing. Leadership training will be an important tool in ensuring that standards of leadership are consistent throughout the youth ministry. One of Newtownbreda's richest resources is the many volunteers who give their time and skills willingly to the youth ministry of the church. Over the next three years we must ensure these volunteers receive effective training and support.

We expect the following objectives will help us achieve this goal:

- Create additional support networks and strengthen the role and function of the church youth council
- Develop a suitable induction programme for new volunteers in order to recruit, grow and support new leaders
- Develop a programme of training events to support all our leaders
- Organise joint events for all youth council groups
- Develop a comprehensive file of policy statements for church youth work.
- Develop a team understating and united approach to work, as well as building relationships between the various organisations
- Initiate the new year with a special Youth Council seminar in August to look at the following issues
 - a. Audit the existing services and needs
 - b. Recruitment and development of new leaders
 - c. 'Job sharing'
 - d. Induction training
 - e. A joint celebration of volunteers engaged in youth and children's work.

Goal Two - Growth

'To develop innovative methods of spiritual growth and discipleship'

'A person who is living on milk...doesn't know much about doing what is right. Solid food is for those who are mature, who have trained themselves to recognise the difference between right and wrong and then do what is right'. Hebrews 5:13,14

The youth ministry of Newtownbreda needs to be something that is firmly based on biblical principles and values, however it must be culturally relevant. In order to help our young people see the relevance of the Gospel to their lives and the role of the church we need to stay ahead of the game. The youth ministry of Newtownbreda seeks to reach out to young people with a 2000 year old message but with brand new packaging. The world of our young people is in constant change and there are many influences seeking to be the dominant voice, the music they listen to, the television they watch, the friends they hang around with, the magazines they read all pull them in different directions. The church aims to be a strong and relevant voice in the world of our young people. It is our aim to achieve this goal by implementing the following objectives:

- The development of a church web site. This will be a place where young people can get information, leave questions or prayer requests and chat to each other
- Coffee bar/drop in. Our plans for a new youth building include the facility for an open area where young people can drop in to at various times of the day
- House groups. Plans for house groups include the development of groups for specific types of people and different needs including those seeking to develop their faith and those seeking to discover faith
- Mid week service. In addition to our monthly youth led services this would be an opportunity to provide young people with an alternative service of worship during the week.

Counselling service. Along with the development of a drop in centre young people could be made aware of different professionals they can speak to including Youth Workers, Ministers, Doctors, careers advisors etc. this would draw on the various talents of our congregation.

Goal Three - Co-operation

'To build better connections between the youth organizations themselves and between them and the church.'

'The body is made of many parts, but the many parts make up one body. So it is with the body of Christ.' 1 Corinthians 12:12

It is vitally important for the effectiveness of the youth ministry of Newtownbreda that the various youth organizations work in co-operation with each other and that they work for and with the full support of the wider church. This goal will be achieved by meeting the following objectives:

Connecting between organizations by:

- Improving communication between the organizations by regular meetings and by the production of quarterly newsletter.
- The youth worker supporting each organisation on an ongoing basis.
- The running of quarterly combined events for young people.
- Running a joint event at the start of the season for the leaders of all organizations. In the first year this will be an event, the second year an all-day programme and in the third, a residential.
- There will be a shared induction programme for all new youth leaders.
- A volunteer policy will be drawn up which will include contracts for all leaders outlining what is required of them and what the church/organization will offer them in return.

Connecting with the church we will aim to:

- develop all-age events throughout the year e.g. sports activities, all age worship, pantomime, barbeque,
- Provide clear lines of communication between the church and the organizations directly and through the youth council.
- The organizations will annually support one major overseas church-based project e.g. Habitat for Humanity.
- There will be mutual support for organizational and church fundraising initiatives.
- The church will facilitate the mutual support of the different organizations by having a nominated elder linked to each organisation.

Goal Four - Partnership

'To work in partnership with the local community.'

'When the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth'. Acts 1:8

In order to ensure that Newtownbreda Presbyterian church is relevant in the Ballynafeigh area we must establish and maintain a significant presence in the area. We must also remember that we are only one of many organisations working in the area and should therefore seek to co-operate with others for the benefit of the young people in the area. The following aims and objectives have been identified to aid us in reaching our goal:

- Consolidate existing relationships with other churches which enables the church to serve the community e.g. through the summer scheme;
- Make the church more open and accessible to the community and local young people by:
 - a. Extending the building to create a suitable environment;
 - b. Building a team of volunteers under a permanent youth worker;
- Enable local young people to see the relevance of the church;
- Ensure the church has a voice in the community by involvement with other local interested parties e.g. PSNI officers, councillors/MLA's, youth workers, Ballynafeigh Youth Strategy group, the Clergy Fellowship, to insure there is a co-ordinated approach to youth work in the area;
- Maintain an on-going relationship with other organisations working with young people e.g. schools, Youth Link, BELB, to keep informed of current and potential initiatives;
- Encourage good inter-church relations by running major youth events with the local Catholic Church e.g. a pantomime.

Goal Five - Outreach

'Devise tailored programmes appropriate to the personal development needs of young people.'

'He commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so that the next generation might know and they in turn would tell their children.' Psalm 78:5-7

The church, like any other organisation, needs to have a structured approach to what it does. It is vital to ensure that we are providing the best possible service to the young people belonging to our church, our organisations or with no current church affiliation. By developing a structured approach to our youth ministry we can enable our current youth organisations and planned events to see where and how they fit in with the overall vision. It will also help us to minimise the overlap we may currently have, and to see gaps that exist in our current provision. To achieve this goal the following aims and objectives have been identified:

- Develop a 'whole person' approach to our youth work. That is, work that includes dimensions of physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual development
- Develop a purpose driven approach to our youth ministry based upon core biblical values of Evangelism, Discipleship, Ministry, Fellowship and Worship
- Support the existing programmes and develop new initiatives which deal with the various different age groups and types of young people, along with development of core values
- Involve the young people in developing what does meet their needs and their perceived future needs
- Develop and strengthen links with the schools in the area, both primary and secondary. This includes participation in assemblies, scripture unions, RE, pastoral care and personal and social education classes. This includes developing our own after schools programme.
- Develop team-based detached youth work in the surrounding area;
- Encourage and support the development of regular parents evenings within the organisations along with regular family events.

Goal Six - Welcome

'Create a safe and welcoming environment for all young people, suitable for befriending and the building of personal relationships.'

'Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realising it!' Hebrews 13:2

Our desire is to create a welcoming environment for every young person who comes into our church. We believe that this is successfully done by building a community where young people feel valued, accepted and cared for. Personal relationships are very important to young people and are vital if we are to share the gospel with them in any meaningful way. We hope to achieve this goal by focusing on the following objectives:

- Developing a befriending scheme that would team a young person with an older person in the congregation in order to provide mutual encouragement and support.
- Provide relevant information about organisations in order that young people make more informed decisions about which organisation(s) meet their needs.
- To ensure entry points for young people of all different backgrounds and stages of faith, for example regular evangelistic events such as the summer scheme
- Ensure that Christianity and the role of the church is promoted by all leaders and shown to be meaningful in their lives and actions
- Ensure that young people have the space and are encouraged to ask questions in order to develop their faith and to reach spiritual maturity. They are free to ask questions without condemnation.
- Young people are actively encouraged to participate in the planning and outworking of our worship services e.g. music drama worship leading
- Create a social area for young people including drop-in, reception and office area.
- Create facilities which welcome parents/guardians of young people comprising of reception area, coffee point and information area.
- Establish an office area to accommodate and resource the youth ministry team.

Closing remarks

The goals outlined above are both ambitious and challenging but we believe attainable. They are inter-connected and inter-dependent upon each other. They have been designed as a balanced approach to work with the identified five groups of people:

- Our own church young people;
- Friends of our church young people;
- Community young people who come to the organisations in the church;
- Community young people who are not currently involved;
- Families of all of the above.

This strategy aims to engage between the church and community, between outreach and discipleship, and strengthening existing youth work while developing new models of youth ministries. This strategy will work with the various groups at different levels, with different approaches and not necessarily together. Some groups will naturally inter-link, whilst some of the objectives will be achieved separately to each other.

Resources

There are obvious resource implications if this strategy is to be implemented in full in Newtownbreda church.

- The youth worker position needs to be reviewed with examination of the hours required and thought given to continuity of employment for the initial three year implementation period of this strategy.
- There is a need to pursue the feasibility of a youth suite catering for the demands of a 'third millennium generation'.

Conclusion

If implemented, the strategy will enable our youth work to develop and grow within our rapidly changing environment. It will require the Kirk Session and congregation's support and unity within the youth organisations. This strategy covers an initial three year period, however youth work is an on-going process and the major benefits will be seen in the longer term. The goals of this strategy build on the existing excellent work but also suggest opening new doors to connect with more young people, to build relationships with them and to demonstrate God's love in new and innovative ways.