

# **Young Adult Ministry within the Methodist Church**

## **Introduction**

The Methodist Church has a long history of working with young people. In recent times the upper age of 'youth' has been 23. Over the last few years, work with young people beyond the 23 age limit has been organically developing, offering support to those in the 18-30 age bracket. Work with this age bracket has been taking place across a number of different teams including Evangelism and Growth (E&G), Ministry Development, Global Relations and Children, Youth and Families (CYF). A plan for the development of Young Adult ministry was agreed in 2024, with appropriate funding to support the work.

## **Young Adults – who are they?**

We refer to Young Adults as being in the 18-30 age bracket. This is a wide age-range, and it is recognised that not all pieces of work will be aimed at everyone in that age bracket, but some will have a specific age/life-stage focus.

## **Why should we have a specific focus on Young Adults?**

Young adults are unique in the multiple, overlapping, complex transitions they navigate: between child/adolescent and adult, between being students and graduates, between being children of parents to parents of children, to discerning and discovering their sense of self, preparing for specializations in work, taking ownership of their own journeys of faith and discipleship. The structures of Church may no longer suit the transient lifestyle that young adults have, nor may church be helping them with the big questions they are grappling with, and many will have had no previous connection to a Church. All this can lead to a disconnect with both Church and faith, yet they are a generation who are spiritually open, who are passionate about inclusion and justice issues and keen to take action. It is the intentionality of focussing on this age bracket that will make the difference, both in the lives of this generation and in building the Kingdom of God. Young adults are called, as are all people, to full and flourishing lives of discipleship following in the way of Jesus Christ and to meaningful vocations of service participating in the mission of God. The Church's calling is to nurture discipleship; to invite all into lives shaped by the means of grace, reflected in the living out of a 'Methodist way of life'. Our task is to focus on the work necessary to encourage that formation among the young adults who are in, associated with, or in reach of, the Methodist Church in Britain.

## **The aim**

To enable a growing movement of young adults through intentional offers that support the development of a culture of flourishing, justice-seeking discipleship, evangelism and vocational exploration.

To enable young adults to be empowered and released as leaders and blessings within local churches and communities, through resourcing and supporting Church leaders and communities to be welcoming, enabling and inclusive of the contribution, gifts and participation of young adults.

## **The Hope**

The vision for work with young adults is embedded in the vision of the Methodist Church. Therefore, the work of this plan echoes what is advocated by the Church through:

- a. in 2020 The Conference adopted God For All report -which articulated the intertwined nature of Our Calling as Methodists. In offering a vision of our being “a growing, evangelistic, justice-seeking, inclusive Church of gospel people”,
- b. In 2022, The Conference adopted ‘Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity’,
- c. In 2022, The Conference received ‘the Action for Hope Plan’,
- d. In 2023, The Conference adopted ‘A Justice-seeking Church: the report of the Walking with Micah Project’,
- e. The Conference continues to affirm the Methodist Church’s safeguarding policy of promoting safe environments where children, young people, and vulnerable adults are protected.

These are the key underpinnings of this work; that our ministry with young adults might be clearly built on the offer of life that is a Methodist Way of Life, embracing growth, evangelism, justice-seeking and inclusion. If the vision for Young Adult ministry is embraced across the Church, then the hope is that we will see a growing number of young adults discovering and being anchored in the way of life of the Methodist Church, able to confidently embody their discipleship, sharing faith and generating and influencing change within and beyond the Church at all levels.

The potential impact of this work relies upon:

- local churches embracing an intentionality to work with this age bracket in creative, imaginative new ways as well as within traditional structures.
- ‘Backwards planning’ so there are connecting pathways through from children’s and youth ministry, at both local and Connexional level, recognizing where these areas of ministry overlap and are built upon so that Young Adult ministry does not sit in isolation.
- Resourcing being available to support young adults with finance, human resources, wisdom and skill to engage with programmes and events.
- The collaboration with colleagues within the Connexional Team and strategic partners.
- Effective communication and relational work with, and between, young adults at all levels.

## **Key Questions for Young Adults**

Research and consultations have been undertaken with young adults, and it has been clear that there are some key areas that young adults are exploring during these years of change; these have been summarized in the three questions below. The main focus of the work for Young Adult ministry is in response to these questions.

**Who am I?** Young adults are exploring who they are, what their beliefs are, what their identity is. Questions like these are explored individually and in community with their peers. If young adults are on a journey of faith they will be at varying stages, many will not have engaged with the Christian faith at all, but are spiritually open. They need spaces where they can explore their doubts and questions and work out how to be their authentic selves.

*In response to this question, a core work area of the plan will focus on young adults being able to encounter faith and deepen their discipleship, for those affiliated and the religiously unaffiliated.*

**Where's my place?** Young adults are in a period of flux, with many changes taking place in their lives, such as leaving home, distancing from parental influence, starting/finishing studies, starting work, starting significant relationships, and living in a variety of places. Many young adults no longer know where they belong or to whom they belong. They are working out who 'their people' are, and who loves them. For those connected to Church they may no longer feel they have a home church or a place in a new church. This is a crucial time for working out where they belong, what their place is in families, in gathered communities, in society, in life or in the Church.

*In response to this question, a core work area of the plan will focus on young adults being supported through life-stage transitions and enabling them to participate fully in the life of the Church.*

**What's my purpose?** Young adults have questions about: - What should I be doing? What work should I be involved with? What should I be doing in my professional and personal life? What does success look like for me? Many unaffiliated young adults will be reflecting on how they can make a difference, those with a faith may be exploring how they can best serve God and the Church. Working out how to live out their lives as inhabitants on a communal planet, or as active disciples, is crucial at this time, as they grapple with the interconnected questions of 'Who am I?' and 'Where's my place?'

*In response to this question, a core work area of the plan will focus on opportunities for vocational exploration.*

In summary, these areas of work:

- Growing faith and deepening discipleship
- Supporting life stage transitions
- Vocational exploration

Will have the cross cutting themes of:

- Building community and connection— creating opportunities for young adults to meet to grow in fellowship and generate a sense of belonging to a community, whilst holding in tension finding appropriate opportunities for intergenerational relationships to form.
- Accessibility –the work will be underpinned by the principles of the JDS strategy
- Affordability – at a stage in life where financial resources will be limited, and to support those living on the margins, opportunities must be affordable. Underpinned by the principles articulated in the Justice-seeking church report. "God consistently shows a bias to people experiencing poverty and those who are excluded. The search for justice must attend to those who live in poverty, and those who are marginalised in other ways, as a priority" (para 108 A justice-seeking Church: the report of the Walking with Micah project)
- Contextualization – recognizing that young adult ministry will not be a 'one-size fits all' and context will need to be taken into consideration within the models offered.

## The work areas

<b>Strategic intention: Grow faith and deepen discipleship so that young adults can be confident to share and live out their faith.</b>		
Key action	We will do this by...	In partnership with...
Increasing circuit and local church understanding of and involvement with Young Adult ministry.	<p>Working with districts and circuits to develop innovative, missional projects for young adults, which are relevant to their contexts, with the intention of investing in the lives of young adults.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each year a small number of potential missional projects would be identified which would benefit from having intentional support and mentoring to begin or develop the project. (The process for this needs to be developed, but it would not be in isolation from the mission planning process.)</li> <li>• Learning from these projects will be shared across the connexion.</li> <li>• From year 2 of this plan, seed funding could be made available to help start these projects.</li> <li>• Although this will link with NPNP work, it will not be about starting new Christian communities, but focussing on the development of the young adults themselves.</li> </ul>	District Missioner community District and circuit Teams NPNP project staff
	Raising awareness of young adult ministry and participation. Attendance/delivery at relevant conferences and training events e.g. Superintendents Conference, The Well training events, Queen's training for ministerial candidates.	CYF Cliff College Queen's Foundation
Development of spiritual/discipleship experiences	Development and delivery of a reimagined Cliff Year. This would require staff time from Cliff College staff. This is ongoing work but development is taking place for Sept 2024. This is identified in the Shared Mission Plan for Cliff College.	Cliff College
	Delivering events and programmes to deepen discipleship of young adults. For example: retreats, pilgrimages,	Learning Network Evangelism and Growth Team Cliff College

	young adult venue at Cliff Festival, 'labs' on evangelism, sports and faith events. Some of this work is ongoing (Cliff Festival), some in planning stages (sports and faith event) other would be new work to be developed. New work would be developed in years 3-5.	Ministries team
Opportunities for theological exploration, including those transitioning out of childhood (16 +)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing opportunities at 3Generate to grow 16-18 year olds theological literacy. This will create spaces for greater understanding of faith and spaces to doubt and raise questions, which are key for generating a discerning and established personal faith. Initial pilot at 3Generate 24.</li> <li>• Providing opportunities at Cliff College for 16+ to engage with the exploration of theology. This continues the opportunities to develop theological literacy and theological reflection. This work would be reliant upon the appointment of a new member of staff at Cliff College.</li> </ul>	Cliff College
Development of networks to support active discipleship	Creating and developing relevant networks e.g. young activists, young preachers. This may grow from already existing youth or adult networks. Development from year 2.	Ministries Team JPIT CYF

<b>Support young adults during life-stage transitions to anchor, renew or begin connections and commitment to faith and church life.</b>		
Key action	Will we do this by...	In partnership with...
Increase and embed participation at Connexional level so young adults can positively and confidently influence change.	Working with the Governance team to find relevant models of involving young adults in church structures/committees at Connexional level. To an extent this has already been started, and links with the re-developed rep programme. Development to start in year 1 with implementation from year 2.	Governance Team
	Development of the Youth Rep programme in light of the changes to reps to Council and Conference, and the changing age bracket for 3Generate, whilst keep the age bracket to cover the 16-21 transitional age. The rep programme has been successfully operating for over 10 years. The work to	CYF

	develop it is already underway with stage 1 of a new model to be ready by 3Generate 2024.	
Investment in supporting and enabling local churches to work effectively with those within their church and community context who are at transitional life stages	Recruitment and support for HE/FE chaplains through training and networks. HE network already exists. FE chaplaincy network needs developing. The Ministries team would lead this work. This work will be from year 2 onwards.	Ministries Team Free Churches Group.
	In partnership with student organizations (e.g. SCM, Fusion) promote support for those going to/leaving university. This work is already ongoing.	Student Christian Movement Fusion UCCF HE Chaplains
	Training and support for youth workers/church leaders to work with the 18+ transitional age, those leaving the care system, young parents and other life-stage transitions. Support for youth workers would happen via the Well network – a network for employees and volunteers working with children, youth and families. Support for young parents and those leaving the care system to be in partnership with CYF and other relevant organisations, which would take place in years 4-5.	CYF Action for Children Care for the Family
	Forces chaplains working with young adults in the forces. Already ongoing work.	MC Forces Board
Connexional programmes and events to intentionally support transitional phases	Offering support at 3Generate for those at transitional life stages, particularly 16-18s and young adult volunteers. Ongoing development work, for initial delivery at 3Generate 24.	CYF
	Developing events/opportunities at a Connexional level that would support 16-early 20s. This would be a new piece of work, but not to be undertaken in the initial stages of the plan, but developed as the need arises in years 4&5	CYF

<b>Enable vocational exploration to fuel flourishing disciples in the world.</b>		
Key action	Will we do this by...	In partnership with...
Mission placement opportunities. To include short and long term placements and experiences.	Reimagining the One Programme to be more flexible to suit the lifestyle of the Young Adult age bracket with opportunities for paid employment within a mission placement. For example, this could be part-time across one year, or a full-time summer placement, or a much shorter opportunity. Hours could vary	Evangelism and Growth District and Circuit teams

	to suit the context of the placement. Funding would be available for Districts to employ a young adult to work in local/circuit/district mission placements with the aim of vocational exploration.	
	Offering JPIT intern opportunities. <sup>1</sup>	JPIT
	Voluntary placements/opportunities e.g. volunteering opportunities at 3Generate, Greenbelt and other Festivals, shadowing opportunities. Some of this work is already underway with opportunities currently offered at 3Generate and Greenbelt. More opportunities to be developed in partnership with other areas of the Connexional team	Ministries team E&G
	Overseas trips, visits and programmes. The Encounter Together programme, delivered by GR is already in existence offering opportunities for people to join a trip overseas. There is also the possibility to develop a specific young adult Encounter Together visit overseas. Follow-up with the young adults on their return would take place. <a href="http://www.methodist.org.uk/encountertogether">www.methodist.org.uk/encountertogether</a>	Global Relations
Leadership development	The Leadership Year is now in its 4 <sup>th</sup> year of delivery and will continue. This programme involves 3 residential weekends and provides coaching for 12 young adults aged 18-30. This programme sits alongside other leadership courses offered by the MCB, such as Transformational Leadership, but exists specifically to support and grow a community of young adults as they consider or begin a leadership journey, offering formation, encouragement and support. This is an entry-level course where further relevant courses will be signposted e.g. Transformational Leadership, Pioneering Pathway, Encounter.	Learning Network E&G
Evangelism experiences	Providing opportunities for young adults to live out and share their faith. This links with the work of Festivals engagement undertaken by the E&G team as well as opportunities for digital evangelism. This work is on-going. Promotion of opportunities is intentionally with young adults e.g. those	E&G

<sup>1</sup> The JPIT intern programme is currently under review. Conversations are ongoing.

	on current programmes, young adults connected with Cliff College and the Queen’s Foundation, other young adult networks.	
Vocational conversations, mentoring/guidance	Creating opportunities for young adults within the Connexional events, volunteering opportunities and programmes on offer to have intentional vocational conversations or access to a coach/mentor. This would utilize the growing network of coaches trained within the Methodist Church.	E&G
	Support for local churches and circuits to intentionally engage young adults in conversations around vocation, through creation or signposting to relevant resources. Currently no significant resource creation required.	Ministries E&G

## Background Information to the mission placement scheme

The One Programme started in 2010; a scheme initially to employ ten 16-23 year olds in projects within a church or related organisation. In recent years the age bracket changed to 18-30 and projects in which the participants were employed had to have a missional and evangelistic focus. Participants were employed for a year from Sept – Aug, either part-time or full time. Attendance at 4 training weekends and 3Generate was included as part of their working hours. In 2022-23 there were seven participants on the programme. The One Programme was paused from 2023 to enable a reimagining of a mission placement scheme.

Whilst the One Programme had been successful over the years, there were increasing difficulties with recruiting. Feedback from the young people has highlighted that their main focus and interest has been the role undertaken, rather than the wider programme. The wide age-range of the programme (18-30) covers a variety of life-stages and not everyone can, or wants to, commit to a year-long programme. The reimagining of the One Programme will retain the main core, which is the paid opportunities to work in a role connected to mission and evangelism. A more flexible approach to the type and length of employment would create opportunities that could attract more young adults to fit with their changing life-stages and cultural contexts. Focusing on the mission placement will generate the strong vocational element, enabling young adults to see this as a way to explore their gifts and calling.

### ***Mission Placement Scheme***

The Mission Placement scheme aims to provide a range of opportunities for young adults to be employed (or voluntarily serve) in mission-focused placements where they can develop skills, grow in discipleship, increase participation with the Church (in all its many forms) and explore their vocation.



### ***Aims***

- To enable young adults to explore their vocation within the world and the church.
- To provide opportunities for discipleship growth and an engagement with mission.
- To enable greater participation of young adults within the life of the Church.
- To encourage and develop young adults in leadership and in service.

### ***The Placements***

Placements could be based in Methodist churches, agencies and projects and, where appropriate, with related agencies and partners. These could be already established projects with placements, or new initiatives. Placements should:

- have a focus on missional activities
- be of such value as to enable a young adult to serve the church or project effectively so they explore their own gifts and develop skills within a practical context of service
- be useful in helping to explore a sense of calling.

The Mission Placement Scheme should encourage deeper local church, circuit and district engagement with the participation, discipleship, vocational exploration and leadership of young adults within a framework of either long term or short term placements. Young adults on a mission placement should be paid an appropriate wage for their work (minimum of the living wage). This might not be appropriate for all short-term experiences. However, if a wage is not being paid for short-term placements, then all expenses should be paid, so that there is no cost for the young adult. All placements need to be accessible to all.

The scheme will have flexibility as not all placements will look the same. Some may be full time work for a period of time, some might be part-time work. Some placements will be for the short –term e.g. a week or a fortnight. Placements could last for 12 months or be much shorter. Funding, guidance and support will be provided Connexionally, but the management of the placement and responsibility for the employee or volunteer will be held at the local circuit or district level.