

## THE WAY WE SEE IT: A RESPONSE

Forward Together in Hope has called our Diocese to look again at what it means to be Church and, as part of this process, the report of the young people's survey 'The Way We See It' has called us to listen to our young people and to respond. The wider Church has also been called at this time to examine its relationship with young people and Pope Francis has announced that in autumn 2018 a Synod will take place on 'Youth, faith and vocational discernment' The preparatory document proposes that *'By listening to young people, the Church will once again be able to hear the Lord speaking in today's world.'*

Priests, parish and school representatives and young people themselves gathered at the Newcastle Assembly Rooms for a diocesan youth ministry conference on 13<sup>th</sup> May. The aim was to reflect on 'The Way We See It' and to begin to develop our response. Bishop Seamus and representatives of many of the Diocesan Departments were also present as were a number of the organisations who work with young people. The keynote speaker and facilitator for the day was Rev David Wilkinson from St John's College, Durham.

David spoke about four things in his address engaging his audience with an inspiring delivery enhanced by a number of video clips. Firstly he asked the question 'What are we thankful for in our youth ministry?' Andrea Hemmings, a member of YMT's Gap Year Team from Stanley, introduced a video showing the many opportunities available for young people in our diocese from primary to secondary school and beyond. Andrea said, *'Young people in our diocese are blessed to have many opportunities to grow in their faith. I want to thank you this morning, because without the support of adults... these opportunities would not be able to happen.'* Affirming all that had happened so far, David set the challenge to continue to develop new opportunities and to respond to the needs reflected in the document such as how we welcome young people.

Secondly, David invited everyone to listen to the voices of young people in a variety of ways ranging from reflecting on some of the comments in the document to listening to four young people who shared their experiences live. 12 year old Grace Cameron spoke about the importance of having opportunities to talk about faith with her friends such as Mini-Vinnies or the Diocesan Festival. Two sixth formers, Saoirse Glynn and Kirsten Timbey, spoke about the difference that a supportive community can make. Rebecca Gallagher, a university student, shared movingly about one of her teachers who had noticed that she was struggling and had invited her to an event not once but three times – and that had made all the difference.

David moved on to examine some of the bigger cultural questions that are important in ministry with young people and finally, he reflected on our trust in Christ and the

call of Jesus which is at the heart of discipleship. Our young people will be called in many different ways and all of them need our affirmation and support.

Fr Dermott Donnelly, Head of the Department for Youth Services, placed the conference in the wider context of the national and world Church and Amy Cameron, Diocesan Leadership Co-ordinator, spoke about the opportunities of the new Partnerships in our diocese. Following lunch, discussion and consultation took place on the ways forward, notes were collated and a summary of these will be available soon. The day concluded with prayer and worship expressing gratitude for young people, for those who work with them and for a spirit of generosity as we move forward in youth ministry.

This was an exciting, passionate, visionary and yet practical event for the 160 participants and will provide the new partnerships with food for thought and action. Some final comments were:

*'This has been an enjoyable and inspirational day, very encouraging for the future of our partnerships.'*

*'I'm going away with optimism and hope and a desire to develop links between our parish and school.'*

*'The witness of our young people was affirming and encouraging. They have so much to give us.'*

*'I realise that I am an important link in a chain and it relies on my generosity.'*

