

Monthly reflection, November 2012

Participation in the body of Christ

Part of the work of the Youth Development Project of the Diocese of London is to encourage Churches to allow young people to participate fully in the life of the Church. This isn't about young people participating in Church services but allowing them to have influence and input into important decisions. Participation Works puts it like this:

"We are interested in not just whether children can freely express themselves, but also if this has influence on a decision and brings about change."

It is important that Churches take time to think about how much they allow young people to get involved in decision making. Do we allow young people on PCCs, steering groups and committees? Do we involve young people in the processes we use to employ new staff? As someone who has had a young person on their interview panel I know that it brings a new level of authenticity to the process.

Participation benefits the Church in so many ways. For example, encouraging older young people to lead Sunday School can keep them involved and is good for both the church and the young people. The church benefits from a stronger foundation of young people who through participative methods feel more valued and equally have a stronger stake in the parish.

The Church is often referred to as "The Body of Christ". All parts of the body are valued and all have an important role to play. Young people are part of this body and can offer gifts and insights that should be used. Youth work is not something that is done to young people but something that includes and enables them to be empowered.

An organisation willing to engage youth at this level shows that its commitment to the future is as strong as its commitment to the present. We have all heard sobering statistics on Church attendance and predictions of future decline. Participation is something a Church needs to embody for its growth to be sustainable.

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