

REPORT OF THE YOUTH COMMITTEE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2017

The main focus of the Committee in the past year has been to produce and agree a strategy for children's and youth work in the denomination. (This is found in Appendix 1.) We are aware that many of our congregations have few, if any, children or young people associated with them. This strategy is designed to encourage and enable every congregation, whether they have any young people or not, to commit initially to one or two clearly defined objectives over the next few months.

PIED

PIED is an acrostic of our four key priorities: praying; innovating; enjoying; and disciple-making. Congregations are invited to commit to one or two objectives in line with these priorities, and to let the Youth Committee know what their focus is on. The Committee will then be able to offer support in one or more of the following ways: prayer; finance; resources; advice and practical help from the Children's and Youth Development Worker.

This PIED strategy for children and youth is in line with the on-going work of the Reshaping for Mission group, and it is anticipated that a focus on reshaping our mission with children and youth can continue to be part of that work across the denomination.

CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

We are grateful to Richard Knott for developing the above strategy in response to his growing knowledge of the United Free Church. He has continued to meet with ministers and congregations throughout the denomination, organised training events, and had regular practical involvement at Sauchie and Fishcross children's club, as well as line-managing Andrew Brown, setting up a Resources Hub and keeping people informed through Stedfast articles, the regular e-newsletter and Facebook group.

We were able to continue Andrew Brown's part-time appointment for 2017. He has responsibility for building relationships with 16-25 year olds by organising meetings for social and spiritual encouragement, and for organising regular Spark meetings for secondary age young people.

EASTER SCHEME

2016's scheme for the Leprosy Mission's training centre for young people in West Bengal, India brought in £10,021.

Training was also the focus of this year's appeal for Dòchas Education Trust, a Scottish charity which works in the Nsanje district of Malawi.

The Committee would like to thank the denomination for their giving to these worthy causes.

RESIDENTIAL EVENTS

It is disappointing to report that the Secondary Camp planned for Alltnacriche in December had to be cancelled due to lack of numbers, as was a Youth Assembly day in Stirling in November. A Primary 5-7 camp is planned for May, and it is hoped to build on the numbers attending Spark to offer a day event, possibly a sleepover, and potentially a weekend away in future.

SAFEGUARDING

The Committee is grateful to the Administration and Finance Committee for acting on our concerns about safeguarding in the denomination and producing new guidelines.

In the name of the Committee

JOHN P CROSS	Convener
ELIZABETH MCDOWALL	Vice-convener
JOHN O FULTON	Secretary

Appendix 1

UF Children's and Youth Strategy: PIED - a colourful patchwork

PIED - having sections or patches coloured differently and usually brightly.

P - Praying

I - Innovating

E - Enjoying

D - Disciple-making

The Youth Committee of the United Free Church has agreed a new strategic approach to its work, aimed at supporting all congregations in their mission and ministry with children and young people.

The visual representation of a colourful patchwork is a helpful image and illustration of the 'PIED' strategy. The strategy seeks to offer a diverse yet united approach to mission and ministry with children and youth, which allows individual ministries within congregations to have a distinctive response born from both the particular needs of its community and from its own strengths, while still remaining part of the wider picture made up of different and colourful approaches.

The word 'PIED' is an acrostic, made up of the initials of the four key priorities of the strategy which are fundamental as we seek to share the Gospel with children and young people in Scotland. Each congregation is invited to join the Youth Committee by committing to one or two objectives which flow from these four priorities.

Why do we need a strategy at all?

Good question! Many of us like things to remain the same. However, it is obvious that over the last decade the number of young people in our congregations has been dwindling. Not only that, but the nature of our contact with children and young people is also changing: there are fewer 'church families' and many children are now in contact with our churches through mid-week clubs, SU Groups in schools, or other ways – and often from homes with no other connection to the church.

We need to be alert to the challenges we are faced with, and prayerfully consider what we can do. We can all pray for children and young people, and Prayer is indeed the starting point of the PIED strategy.

We invite each congregation, therefore, to join the Youth Committee in praying over this strategy, and committing to one or two objectives which flow from the four priorities. Below are the four priorities, and what they might mean for our congregations.

Praying

The Biblical character of Hannah found in 1 Samuel chapter 1 is a helpful reflection and encouragement to pray **for** children and young people, even when we don't have any. Hannah was so desperate in her state of childlessness that she cried out to God in prayer. Not just any prayer; the narrative tells us that she prayed with such passion that she cried "inconsolably" (verse 8, The Message). This drew the attention of Eli the Priest, who accused Hannah of being drunk in the Lord's house! What a state she must have been in. We know that the Lord heard and answered Hannah's prayer and that she bore a son who became the Prophet Samuel.

The first and foremost priority is prayer. If we feel that we can offer nothing else, we can pray for children and young people. This is a challenge and an opportunity for all churches, those (like Hannah) with no children or young people, those with a few, or those with many. It's also a way of including and involving those in congregations who, for whatever reason, feel unable to be involved in ministry with young people in other ways. We can pray individually or we can pray together as part of a group; the format is not crucial, it is our prayers of intercession for children and young people that are vitally important.

We also desire to have prayer **with** children and young people that is creative, engaging and interactive. If we can equip children and young people with a prayer life where they engage with their Father in Heaven in a way that is easy and relaxed and becomes part of who they are and how they relate with God, they will be equipped for a life of faith. There are resources and materials available to help churches be creative in their prayer methods with children and young people. For example, the book "Ultimate Creative Prayer" by Judith Merrell, and websites www.prayerspacesinschools.com and prayingyouth.com.

Innovating

We will be willing to try new things, and also to stop anything that isn't effective and try something else. A willingness to innovate and change our approach and tactics to enable us to respond to the leading of God, and to the needs of the children and young people we encounter in our communities, will enable the most effective ministry.

It will take courage to step out in faith and to be willing to try things that may or may not work and to be brave enough to call a halt to established ministries that are no longer engaging children and young people into a life of faith in the Lord Jesus. This courage to change or adapt our approach while remaining faithful to the Gospel, and to respond to God's leading and to the needs faced in our contexts is vital in an ever changing society.

Each congregation is asked to prayerfully consider its approach to children and youth: perhaps conduct a review of current practice, take stock of the resources available to the congregation and used by those leading Sunday Schools, ask the children and young people themselves to help shape future ministry with them. In this strategic priority we encourage congregations to be brave and be willing to try something new!

Enjoying

Young people need to enjoy their experience of church; fun is a key ingredient. Being interactive and creative in our work is crucial. Play is key too. If it's not enjoyable, why will they want to come? Research tells us that many children choose to leave church as early as 8 years old, but do not have the power to follow through on that decision until later. We must ensure that children and young people enjoy their experience of church. It's not necessarily about the latest technology or advanced ministry tools. Like all ministry it's centred on good positive relationships.

Are we in the church a pleasure to be around? Do we show compassion and care and interest in the things that are important and are of interest to children and young people? Do we notice when they are missing? Do we celebrate their birthdays? Do we laugh together? Do we demonstrate that Jesus came to offer us all life in all its fullness? Do we invite young people and children to participate with us and do they have a voice in decision making,

particularly when it affects them? Does our church feel like a family, with everyone equally valued and loved?

We must prioritise the enjoyment of children and young people by creating safe and welcoming environments where they can know that they are valued and cared for and cared about. Consider ways of making your time with children and youth an enjoyable experience for them. See the objectives below for some initial ideas.

Disciple-making

We will focus ourselves on the biblical imperative of helping children and young people follow Christ. Part of this means building appropriate and encouraging relationships and creating environments that promote the Christian faith. We will seek to offer opportunities to explore the truth of the Bible and to respond in ways that are appropriate for them as individuals.

Our commitment is to enable every child and young person we have connection with both to hear and have an opportunity to respond to God's call on their lives by committing to lifelong discipleship.

Great! But what does that look like in practice?

PIED isn't just a theory! These four key priorities have to be outworked if they are to be effective. Below are suggested objectives for local congregations to consider. We are all different, ministering in different contexts and so they can be adopted, adapted or replaced as appropriate to each local situation. Pray them through, and perhaps set one or two objectives at a time.

Praying

- Within 2 months establish a prayer partnerships programme in your congregation, linking a couple or an adult to each of the children and young people connected to your congregation who will commit to pray regularly for them. Review on an annual basis. Some guidance and safeguarding guidelines are available on request.
- Within 2 months commit to pray for the school or schools within a 5-mile radius of your congregation. Register your prayer commitment with Pray for Schools Scotland and receive ongoing support in doing this (www.Prayforschoolsscotland.org.uk).
- Within 4 months use the congregational 'Pray like Hannah' resource which encourages focused prayer for children and young people for a whole month – especially if your church currently doesn't have any! This resource is available on request.
- Within 1 month increase the regular use of creative prayer ideas with children and young people. Consider special prayer events, prayer journals, daily prayer books, prayer stations etc. Continue to monitor for 3 months and track progress. Again, advice is available on request.

Innovating

- Within 3 months undertake a review of current practice. Evaluate the effectiveness of the current model, determine if there are any new opportunities which might be realised and identify threats or weaknesses encountered. Establish a new initiative or approach in response within 3 months.
- Within 2 months, if necessary, apply to the Youth Committee for financial help towards resources to effect innovation in ministry with children and young people in your congregation and community.
- Within 2 months contact the Children's and Youth Development Worker or the Reshaping for Mission Group of the UF Church to seek help and advice on reshaping your mission and ministry with children and young people.

Enjoying

- Within 1 month make specific time for play, to have fun and laughter in your activities with children and young people and as a whole church community.
- Within 2 months conduct a review of your ministry with children and young people and ask the young people what they would like to do to have more fun together? Within 1 further month arrange a suitable date or opportunity to try any of their suggestions.
- Within 3 months arrange a series of social outings or events to take place over the next 12 months. These events will focus on simply being together and enjoying each other's company. If your congregation currently has no children, invite grandchildren or families you know to join you in these.

Disciple-making

- Within 2 months create an opportunity for children and/or young people to respond to the gospel message in an appropriate way for them.
- Within 2 months use Alpha/Christianity Explored/Youth Alpha/the Y course or a similar type of resource to facilitate a series of activities where children or young people have the opportunity to hear the key messages of the Christian faith and to respond in an appropriate way for them.
- Within 3 months promote residential events for children and young people, including UF Church events and SU Scotland and Urban Saints.
- Within 3 months seek to identify volunteers to initiate a Christian group at a local school or explore the possibility of running Religious Observance programmes in your church at Christmas or Easter (to find out more about all the above, email regional@suscotland.org.uk).

These strategy objectives are a top priority if we are going to see change and growth. PIED isn't just about congregations, however – we as a Youth Committee want to invest in helping move this strategy forward, and so have made the following commitments:

Commitments made by the Youth Committee

- Within 2 months create a resource hub to share ideas and resources appropriate for ministry with children and young people in a UF context which will be available for all UF churches to access. This will be a combination of online and physical resources, including a lending library for congregations both to contribute to and benefit from.
- Within 1 month establish a fund to offer bursary support to congregations investing in new innovations in mission and ministry with children and young people. This is intended to support congregations who would find it difficult financially to fund such innovation. Congregations are invited to apply to the youth Committee for funding up to a maximum of £500 for a specific project or resources. More information and application forms are available upon request from Richard Knott (Richard@ufcos.org.uk).
- Each year the Committee will facilitate appropriate residential and social events as a way of supporting the ministry of congregations in encouraging children and young people
- The Committee will enable the Children's and Youth Development Worker to support individual congregations to progress objectives in line with this strategy, including advice and practical help.

If Richard Knott or the Youth Committee can be of any assistance as you seek to respond to the ideas and challenges presented in this strategy, please get in touch. Richard can be reached via email at richard@ufcos.org.uk or by calling 07577 867024. For those on

Facebook there is also a Facebook group for those involved in mission and ministry with children and youth in the UF Church which can be found at www.facebook.com/groups/ufcos.cyp/

Richard also produces a regular electronic email newsletter; if you would like to be added to the subscription list please let him know!