

## DYference – Synod report



In June this year, 48 young people aged 11-16 from across the district gathered at Glenbrook Outdoor Activities centre, for 'A weekend of fun and exploration!' And what fun it was! With a total of 25 leaders dipping in and out over the weekend, leading talks, playing instruments, instructing activities, playing games, cooking,

engaging, embracing, worshipping and laughing, a lot of hard work went into ensuring every one of those young people left the centre feeling empowered, encouraged, and with a smile on their faces, safe in the knowledge that their church cares about them.

Once everyone had found their rooms, settled in, eaten, and chosen their workshops for the weekend, they were able to go outside and make the most of the beautiful sun we got that day! Games were played, teams were built, and friendships formed. The hot chocolate and marshmallows were brought out, and the young people came inside, and this was when the weekend really began. Firstly, the young people were encouraged to take ownership of the weekend by creating of the DYF agreement. This meant writing down our golden rules for the weekend. Some were more sensible than others but in the end we compiled a list of the most important and were able to get on with the real business of the weekend, fun and fellowship.

The rest of the evening was spent looking at relationships. A bit of worship, a bit of prayer, a bible reading and looking at different aspects of God, God the father, and God the king amongst others. That evening the young people really engaged with the teaching, and particularly enjoyed lying down for sung worship as we projected the words on the roof. It was great to see so many young people, especially as they weren't all church goers, really showing an interest and exploring Gods love, and the relationships we have with Him, and through Him.



A late night was followed by an early morning, and not the most cheerful faces at breakfast, but once fed everyone began to perk up and we got a chance to hear from Vernon, and understand a bit more about the Methodist church. The day was split into 4 time slots, and the young people were able to move round different activities and workshops, varying from Archery to asking leaders big questions, crafts to discerning gifts and games to mating, dating and waiting. This allowed fun and freedom to mix with understanding and exploring, and let the young people see that Christian doesn't automatically mean boring! When asked for feedback many of the workshops were rated a 4 or 5 out of 5, and comments like 'really encouraging and fun' 'I learnt a lot from it' 'enlightening' and 'some very interesting questions answered' show the young people really got something out of the weekend, and enjoyed more than just the activities!



Saturday evening was all about having fun, Hayley Moss (The then youth president) and Roxanne and Abby (2 of the fabulous 3gen elected conference reps) came and joined in, and got a chance to chat to the young people and hear their views. We all got a go on the kangoo boots, had a cocktail bar (non alcoholic-

of course!), a camp fire, an outdoor open mic session, and a disco with glowsticks galore and popcorn for everyone! There was singing, dancing, laughter, and everyone had a great time. So great in fact that we made a last minute decision to cancel our 'late night connect' and continued to dance instead

Sunday morning came and some even more tired looking faces than the day before were dragged (almost literally in some cases!) out of bed and up for breakfast. Luckily after breakfast it was time for a quick chat with Hayley and the reps, and clearly prepared for grumpy, tired 11-16 year olds they had of course brought sweets! They started with a few activities that involved getting us moving and gathering opinions (from who likes one direction to who feels like the church cares about them!). The young people were asked what made them feel like the church invests in them. It was saddening to see one or two responses were that they didn't, but overwhelming to see how many of the young people did feel like the



church was investing in them, through things like the youth groups we run for them, to the weekend itself. The majority of the young people really felt that we as a church cared about them, and that was great to hear.

The final thing to do was of course a service with communion, but with 48 young people and the Rev. Andrew Checkley in charge, it was of course a communion like no other. There were questions, sweets, videos, songs, and of course, shloer in shot glasses instead of that terrible (Sorry, delicious) communion wine we usually get, with the bread that had been baked by the young people the day before. The young people were able to fully engage with the 'service' and have some fun. They were encouraged by Andrew to ask questions, and not just sit back and not understand what Christianity and church is really all about. The young people enjoyed the service, with many comments that it was fun, and better than a 'normal' service, they enjoyed the different activities, and loved the use of modern worship songs over traditional hymns.

It is clear that the weekend was an absolute success, and everyone went home happy. I



think we all have a lot to learn about how to make our churches more accessible to the young people who are clearly interested in our God, and our faith, I hope that this event can grow and develop and give the young people in our district a real opportunity to have their voice heard in the church. But most importantly, I

challenge you all to look at your churches, and think about whether it's young people unwilling to engage, or us simply not being engaging.. Make 'normal' a bit more exciting.