



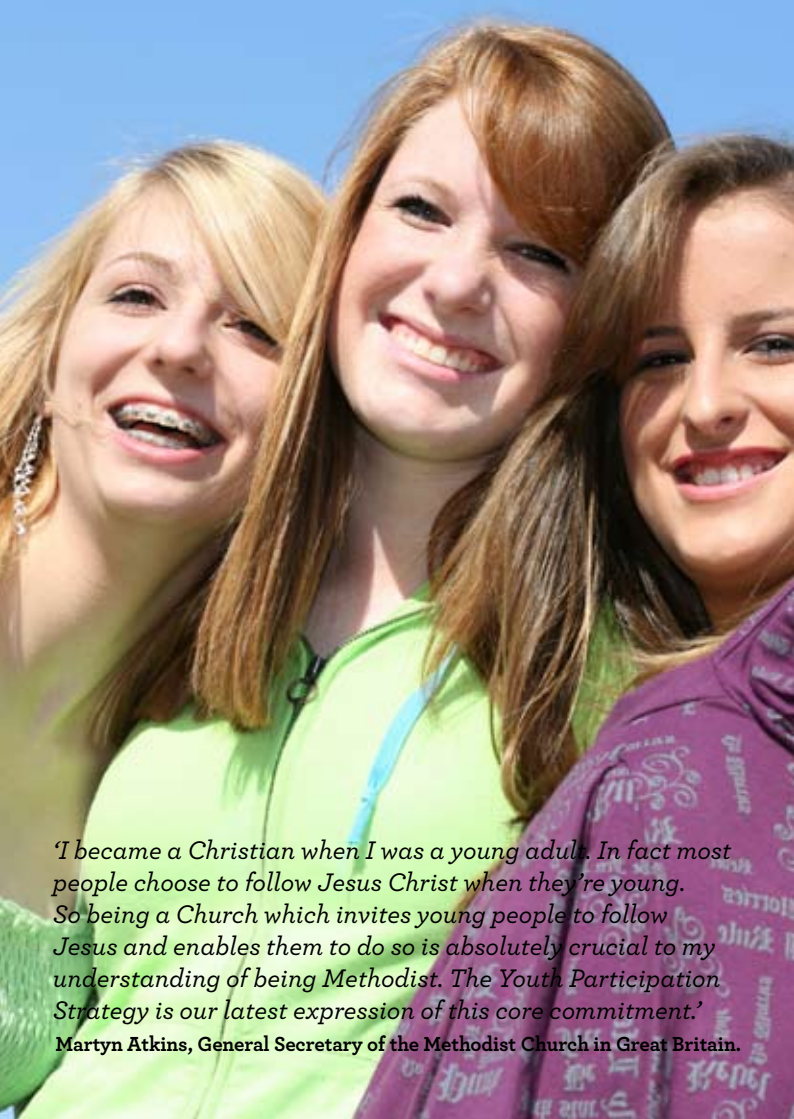
youth participation strategy

IT'S ABOUT EVERYONE



children&youth

METHODIST



youth participation strategy

IT'S ABOUT EVERYONE

First things first: participation is about everyone, not just young people. It's part of the Methodist Church's bigger vision – part of the Children and Youth Team's wider strategy – to see the *whole* church participating more; making and moulding the shape and substance of the church, *together*.

Participation and involvement mean changing the way we run our meetings, plan our worship, make our decisions. Participation and involvement mean changing the way we are church together.

And participation is especially important for young people. This is because young people only have a slim chance of ever really controlling the events that shape their lives – because power is so unevenly distributed in our society, and in our churches.

The Youth Participation Strategy signals our commitment to engage with and develop our young people. We believe that if we build their power to make – and then carry through on – decisions, we will be

'I became a Christian when I was a young adult. In fact most people choose to follow Jesus Christ when they're young. So being a Church which invites young people to follow Jesus and enables them to do so is absolutely crucial to my understanding of being Methodist. The Youth Participation Strategy is our latest expression of this core commitment.'
Martyn Atkins, General Secretary of the Methodist Church in Great Britain.

challenging the distribution of power in our society. And this would be a transforming and political act.

Youth participation, then, means involving young people in responsible, challenging action – meeting their genuine needs and providing them with opportunities to be involved in real planning and real decision-making. It's real.

The decision of Methodist Conference in 2007 to set up the **Youth Participation Strategy** (the **YPS**) was brave. It was also pioneering. The Methodist Church is the *first* mainstream church in the UK to be developing youth participation as an integral part of its mission.

The YPS is part of the Children & Youth Team's wider plan; it fits in with the bigger picture of where the Methodist Church sees itself needing to head.



This is real.
We are turning a buzz phrase into something that will make a **real** difference in young people's lives; and, ultimately, in the lives of **everyone** in the church.



‘The YPS is a once-in-a-lifetime chance for young people to be actively involved in the Methodist Church at every level.’

A member of YPS steering group

it's time

Our society has a problem. One in 10 of our young people have no job, nor are they on any training scheme or in any form of education. Labeled ‘NEET’s (not in education, employment or training), there are very nearly a million in Britain today.

This sense of a generation of young people on the rubbish heap is thrown into even sharper focus when you consider that the UK also has the highest rates for teenage pregnancy, teenage abortion and the lowest figures for self-esteem in Western Europe.

And inside the church, the picture is not much better.*

Whichever way you look at it, it’s a sad situation.

Our young people need Good News.

Our young people need us.

And we need them.

*In 1986, there were 390,000 children in Methodist church-sponsored groups. By 2005, this number had slumped to just 175,796 – that’s a worrying 55% decline. See P14 for more recent declining youth attendance illustrations.

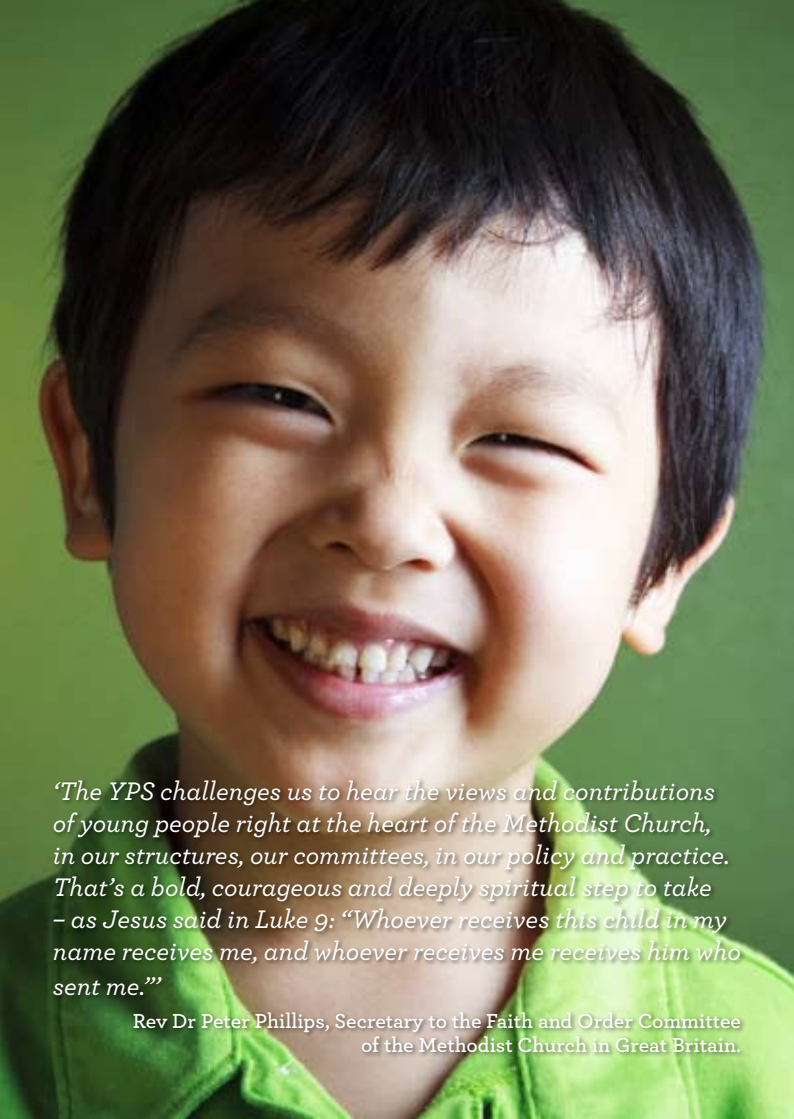
it's a change

The church's approach to children's and youthwork has traditionally been educational and pastoral. That was fine when society knew what Christianity was and what the church was for. But we can no longer assume this. The task of children's and youthwork has shifted. Now it's about enabling a new way of being church to be born: a church about mission, community and worship; a church that is inspiring and energising.

The YPS offers such an alternative – an approach to working with young people modeled on Jesus' own life. Just as 'The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood' (John 1:14, *The Message**), the YPS brings young people into the heart of their own church.

The YPS is the next step in the journey towards a true understanding of what an inclusive church will look like. It will provide young people opportunities to be involved in and to influence the mission and ministry of the Methodist Church. This might renew our existing models of church. Or it might lead to completely new and fresh expressions of church. We shall see.

**The Message - The Bible in Contemporary Language 2002, Eugene H Peterson, ISBN 1-57683-289-9*



"The YPS challenges us to hear the views and contributions of young people right at the heart of the Methodist Church, in our structures, our committees, in our policy and practice. That's a bold, courageous and deeply spiritual step to take – as Jesus said in Luke 9: "Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.""

Rev Dr Peter Phillips, Secretary to the Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church in Great Britain.

it's about everyone

For too long we have been separated from our young people. In our towns, they hang about in gangs that make *them* feel safe and *us* feel threatened. While in our churches, in our Sunday Schools and Junior Churches (no matter how well run and successful they are) they are kept separate, too. This can no longer be seen as the model for involving our children and young people in the life of the church.

We have forgotten how to listen to and interact with our children and young people; forgotten that renewal movements are nearly always started by the young; forgotten how to like, let alone love, them; forgotten what it means to be the Body of Christ – and that means *everyone, together*.

This is what the YPS means. It's about *everyone*. Being the Body of Christ *together*.

it's God-shaped

At its heart, participation is essentially about how we relate to each other. It is an *idea* that values *all* humans as equal and valuable. And that's how Jesus interacted with people. It's why He had disciples; why He chose to speak *with* people not just to them. It's also how God treats us, allowing us to be *co-creators* in God's creation. And it's how the Holy Spirit works, as the One who comes alongside.



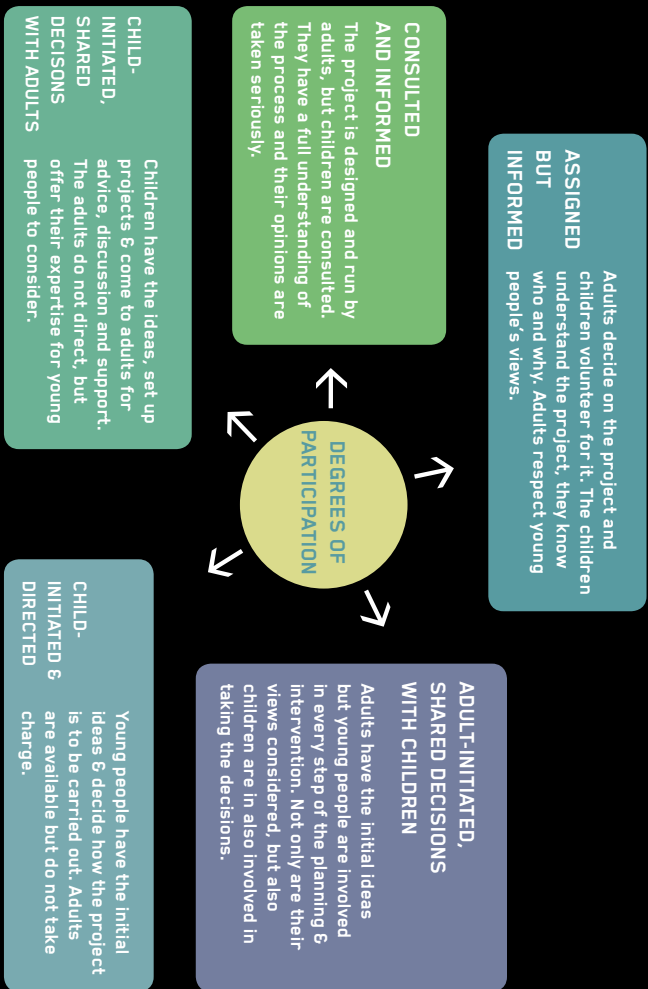
it's grounded

Participation is a dynamic form of relationality, modeled by God and given to us as a shape for living. It means being *part* of something. For our young people, that means being part of the Body of Christ on earth, the church.

But participation also means being able to influence, mould, and make the thing you are a part of. And that means young people being able to influence, mould, and make the Body of Christ, the church.

This will involve the church engaging with young people way beyond its traditional reach. It's an approach that requires us to rethink and reshape our idea of youthwork; to reimagine what it might mean and look like to see children and young people *really* growing, *really* being nurtured, *really* becoming disciples.

There are many well respected and established theoretical models of participation. Many of them relate well to church life, resonating with our theological understanding of what it means to be church. So, not only does participation have a theological basis, it has theoretical frameworks we can draw on too.



it's a plan

OPPS, PARTICIPATION PROJECT MANAGERS, YOUTH ASSEMBLY AND YOUTH PRESIDENT

As a key part of the YPS, we have initiated a new youth placement scheme – the One Programme – in which young people (our One Programme Participants, or OPPs) will be paid to engage with their local church in creative and constructive pieces of work.

We are working with all the Districts to identify projects into which young people (our **OPPs**) will be



placed to work alongside qualified, experienced adults – partnering together to build God's Kingdom in their neighbourhood.

In addition, we are recruiting **Participation Project Managers** – highly skilled, experienced people who will work across the Connexion to advocate and agitate for participation *everywhere*. Under the guidance of the **Youth Participation Development Officer**, these peripatetic participation experts will serve the Methodist Regions – in the south-west, the south-east, in Wales and the West Midlands, the East Midlands, Lancashire, Yorkshire, and the North and Scotland.

We are also developing the traditional annual Youth Conference, building on its strengths, and transforming it gradually into a **Youth Assembly** and designing it to be more collaborative, drawing on the skills of young people to make it more inclusive.

We're also upping the profile and role of the **Youth President**, who will be appointed each year at the Youth Assembly to be the formal spokesperson for young Methodists wherever one is needed – both inside *and* outside the Church. We will employ the Youth President for a year, full-time.

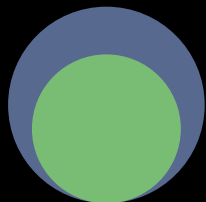


SHRINKAGE IN WEEKLY YOUTH ATTENDANCE BY REGION, 2005 – 2007

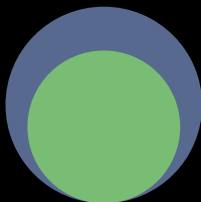
SOURCE: STATISTICS FOR MISSION, 2005 – 2007,
METHODIST CONFERENCE REPORT, 2008

PURPLE: 2005

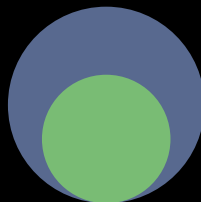
GREEN: 2007



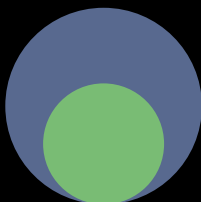
SOUTH WEST



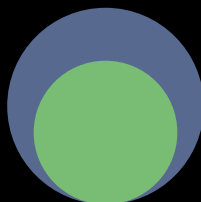
SOUTH EAST



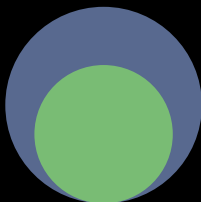
WALES /
WEST MIDLANDS



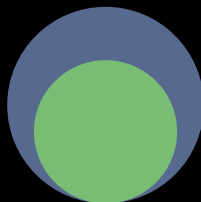
EAST MIDLANDS



LANCASHIRE



YORKSHIRE



NORTH / SCOTLAND

it's shaping up

From 2004 to 2007, we saw a 46% decline in youth contact with the Methodist Church on a weekly basis. And the illustrations opposite show what this shrinkage looked like over an even shorter period. It's clear that we need our young people to participate again in the life of the church.

So, over the coming months, all over the Connexion, our OPPs will be getting involved. The projects they work with will be different in the 32 Districts. After all, some Districts are predominantly rural, some are heavily urbanised. But all have children and young people in them.

If every District employs a young person there will be a much greater diversity of voices being heard and informing our wider mission and ministry models.

The Youth Participation Strategy is not a one-size-fits-all programme. Instead, it is about seeing the Kingdom of God grow in the lives of our young people – and, in growing their mission and in their ministry, we hope to see transformation in our Districts and in our churches.

it's for us all

We need the whole church to get behind this. So, we urge you to pray for the YPS – its OPPs and Participation Project Managers – and for the young people of our country.

We have an opportunity, together, not only to build disciples, but to make a real difference to the lives of our young people, to the life of our church, and to the life of our country.

Getting young people to believe that they can change things in their lives, that they can take action, that they can have the confidence to speak out their opinions in public will take time. But we're confident that, *together*, we can make this happen. Because participation is about *everyone*.

contact

We are developing resources for anyone who catches a vision of the need for this approach and wants to help us realise it. So, for more information or to get involved please contact the Youth Participation Development Officer or any member of the Children and Youth Team via:

The Helpdesk

Methodist Church House
25 Marylebone Road
London NW1 5JR

020 7486 5502
helpdesk@methodistchurch.org.uk

www.childrenandyouth.org.uk

Quotations are not attributable to people shown in accompanying pictures.

Scripture taken from *The Message*. © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002.
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‘The Methodist Church should take onboard the YPS as it is transforming young people. Since the YPS, I actually feel part of the Methodist Church and feel that I am listened to and made welcome. The YPS has made me feel proud to be a Methodist and has encouraged me to bring friends into the church.’

Fiona Holmes, Youth Rep at Conference, 2008,
Planning Group for Youth Assembly 2009.



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www.childrenandyouth.org.uk