



LISTENING TO OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

Listening and feedback played an important role during the youth stream at the Baptist Assembly. A couple of listening exercises took place during the programme, and everyone who attended was invited to feed back on what worked well, what didn't and ideas for the youth programme going forward.

The space was facilitated by Clare Hooper from the Children, Young People and Families (CYF) Round Table and a team from Southern Counties Baptist Association, and the emphasis was on connection - connecting with each other and connecting with God.

These are some of the themes which emerged.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TIME TOGETHER

A consistent theme which emerged throughout was the value of simply being together. There was a real sense of wanting to connect. This was more important to the young people than the more formal aspects of the event, such as the Bible studies.

It's a very relational response. A number (but certainly not all) are the only people in their age group at their church, and they value being able to spend time with Christians the same age as them. The Assembly is a great opportunity: being with people who are going through similar things helps to give them the sense they are not alone, share experiences with their peers and strengthen their faith. That sense of connecting with their friends was overwhelming, and they value being part of Baptists Together.

We need to trust that God is at work through their relationships. Building in that free time is really important – that's where a lot of work is done!

SMALLER GROUPS, DEEPER FRIENDSHIPS

Those who attended the Assembly valued the opportunity to discuss ideas and have conversations with a smaller number of people. They wanted to listen more deeply and get to know each other in more depth. They really appreciated the format, which gave them space to do that. This also chimed with the wider Assembly theme of connection and conversation.

JUSTICE AND MISSION

Our young people want next year's Assembly to have a focus on justice and mission. Environment justice is particularly important to them, but they want to live in a society that has justice concerns at its heart. They want to learn more about the theological underpinnings.

I'm really excited they want to talk about mission. I think sometimes we project our thoughts onto them, and feel they aren't confident about sharing their faith. But recent research¹ amongst young Christians in the UK shows the picture is different. They don't have the hang-ups about sharing their faith that we might think they have. Youth clubs aren't as popular, so the onus is on the young people to share their faith – and they're wanting to learn more about this.

My sense is their understanding of mission and evangelism is holistic – it's something that permeates the whole of life.

¹ Visit: youthscape.co.uk/research/influencers

CREATIVITY

Many of our young people love to be creative, and all the most popular workshops that we offered were the creative ones, such as making prayer beads, drama or stress balls. It helped them explore and express their faith in different ways. Our faith is often so word based that we can be in danger of forgetting the other senses and different approaches by which we learn.

THE FUTURE

This is the beginning of a five-year plan in which the CYF Round Table will oversee the youth stream at the Baptist Assembly. Bournemouth was the start, so we will think about what worked well, what didn't and build something together. The young people have given us some fantastic feedback to help us going forward.

We'll think about what it means to listen to their voices, and help them find their voice – the piece in the last magazine (Summer 2022) was the start of that. How can we integrate our young people's voices more fully in Baptist life?



Clare Hooper is a Southern Counties Baptist Association regional minister with a particular remit to support churches and pioneers in their mission with children, young people and families (CYF). She serves on the Baptists Together CYF Round Table, and co-ordinates the CYF input at Bristol Baptist College as one of the tutors.

