**Youth Leaders’ Gathering 2024.**

I attended my first URC Youth Leaders’ Gathering and as part of the experience we had a taster of Youth Assembly at Whitemoor Lakes. The Youth Leaders’ Gathering was an eye-opening, enjoyable experience that allowed us to connect with other youth leaders who shared the same aim – to explore how God’s story impacts the work we do with young people. **Caroline Yele, Volunteer Youth Leader, Askew Road URC.**

This was my first experience of the Youth Leaders’ Gathering. The sessions covered a wide range of topics, each filled with valuable insights and practical advice. It was evident a lot of effort and research had gone into preparing these sessions, and I appreciate the dedication of the leaders in providing us with such comprehensive information.

However, I couldn't help but feel that the sessions could have been more engaging. While the information was certainly valuable, the delivery could have been more dynamic and interactive. Some tend to learn better when we are actively engaged in the learning process. Perhaps incorporating more group discussions or interactive activities

Would have made the sessions more interesting and memorable.

Furthermore, I believe that the leaders could have also incorporated more biblical references and teachings into the sessions. As Christians, we need to base our leadership skills on biblical principles and values. While the sessions did touch on some biblical concepts, I believe that a deeper integration of biblical teachings would have made the sessions even more impactful and

relevant to our role as leaders.

In conclusion, while the sessions were detailed and informative, some areas could have been improved to make them more engaging. By incorporating more interactive elements, biblical teachings, and considering individual learning styles, the sessions could have been even more enriching and beneficial for all participants. I am grateful for the knowledge and skills I gained from these sessions, and I am confident that they will greatly benefit me in my role as a leader.

Something specific that I took away was the importance of tailored activities to suit different children with different needs as well as the importance of listening to what young people would like to see in church. **Catherine Yele, Volunteer Youth Leader, Askew Road URC.**

The Leaders Gathering took place once again this year running alongside Youth Assembly which always has its positives for me as a youth worker and the young people taking part in Youth Assembly. I have been to all three Leaders Gatherings and find it gives me space to reflect on my year of youth work with other liked minded workers. Through a session with one of the keynote speakers we explored and looked at some statistics and trends about young people and their correlation to church, society, and us. What things have happened, what has changed to generate these interesting statistics? The impacts of COVID etc. This session I enjoyed because as a whole group discussed and weighed up theories and ideas and then thought about possible resolutions for some of these things and what we could do on a youth worker level, a wider church level and on a synod level to help children and young people. So, some similarities with Youth Assembly. I do think it would be beneficial to have a few more speakers like this who can share their knowledge and experiences which in turns helps us as workers compare, discuss, and reflect.

A big benefit is being able to see and interact with my young people, being able to witness things such as Grange Park’s own Philippa Osei in action as Moderator of Youth Assembly or listening to the uplifting worship from Jo Amoah and the dedicated praise and worship band, or just simply listening and talking to my young people whilst there. **Sheliesa Stewart, Children’s and Youth Worker, Grange Park.**

**Youth Assembly 2024: Keynote and Business Sessions.**

**Business Sessions.**

We were also immersed in the same theme as the youth, "Story, Story, Story," and wasting no time, our first session really explored this theme. We completed some speed dating style icebreakers allowing us to share our stories and looked at a list of Bible stories, working in groups to put them in Biblical timeline order.

In every business session, we used stories, statistics and resources and heard from speakers that allowed us to explore how God's narrative, our personal experiences, and the stories of the young people we work with, shapes the work we do. Nigel Pimlott delved deeper into maintaining faithfulness to God during societal changes, and he drew from his expertise in pioneer ministry, youth work and leadership development.

The weekend led to new inspiration and knowledge sharing for the future and allowed us to exchange hopes, fears, successes, and failures, which in turn empowered us in our calling to work with young people. Reflecting on this experience, returning to my church, we’re considering implementing a similar model of open sharing and collaboration within our church council and youth meetings. We will encourage anyone working with young people to remain faithful and adaptable in their ministry, supporting each other through any challenges. We will use the resources taken away from the weekend to enrich our youth work and strengthen its impact on the lives of young people.

**Keynote.**

In the keynote, Rosalind Selby shared some crucial insights for young people today, and although the sound could have been clearer at some points, Rosalind raised some great ideas. Touching on the importance of embracing failure as a stepping stone for success and how it builds resilience and adaptability. It was also pointed out that in the Bible, Jesus gave us good examples where he conversed with individuals people wouldn’t have expected, and our continuous learning, especially through diverse experiences, helps to build empathy and leads to better collaboration - that’s within the church and beyond. Overall, the keynotes provided invaluable advice for young people, providing food for thought and a positive outlook on our life story and journey in Christ. **Caroline Yele, Volunteer Youth Leader, Askew Road URC.**

**Worship and social aspects of Youth Assembly.**

During my time at the youth assembly, I enjoyed the praise worship. Joe Amoah (the Chaplin for Youth Executive) from my church was leading and I was introduced to new songs that were heartfelt and meaningful. I enjoyed listening and joining in to worship. I also liked the sermon Joe gave that was about the theme of stories and how us and all those in the bible have a story to share. I got to do different activities with my newfound friends I met, such as table tennis, basketball, and cards games. It was my last year at Youth Assembly, which is sad, but I get to reflect on the good memories I have from here. **Darius age 26.**

This time around, my experience at Youth Assembly was significantly better as it wasn’t my first time. I was able to reunite with my friends from last year and make new ones which I’m grateful for as I struggle finding friends who follow Christ. The workshops and late-night programs were amazing too as it was a time to really mingle and have fun with others in ways, you wouldn’t normally do. The services were so lively too with the band playing great songs and learning the dance moves that go with it. Although I had a good time at Youth Assembly, there were some flaws around the meals. My friend has a gluten intolerance meaning she can’t eat the same food as us sometimes, but the substitutes weren’t very appealing to neither her nor me and the rest of my friends. Especially on Sunday lunch when we were all eating a roast dinner from what I remember but there was nothing in place for her, so the staff gave her 3 dry cheese and ham sandwiches with cucumber and lettuce on the side. It was a shame seeing this as she didn’t get to enjoy the food the same way we did. I hope for next year they can look into better options for those with dietary requirements. I am really looking forward to going again next year and continuing these friendships and exploration of my faith! **Shareen age 17.**

Youth Assembly was a good first experience and I enjoyed the socialising a lot. I liked that we were given the choice to choose who we could share rooms with and the chance to be in activity groups with people we didn’t know to make sure we made new friends and socialised. There were many different people our ages from different ethnicities, this helped with getting to know different people. The free time gave me and the group I came with, time and space to play multiple basketball matches with different guys and girls, this helped create friends who I will keep in touch with. I enjoyed our small group sessions with Aaliyah and Lorraine. We got to learn new things/passions about ourselves, our group, and people we didn’t know before.**Lawrence age 16.**

**Small groups/Workshops and over experiences of Youth Assembly.**

Youth Assembly has proven to be a rewarding experience, particularly in the realm of building connections with fellow synod members through social interactions. These moments of personal connection have added a valuable dimension to the overall gathering. However, as we reflect on the event, one area that could benefit from enhancement is the Youth Decide and Youth Choose segments. While the assembly has been enriching, some participants have expressed a desire for more free time and entertainment opportunities within some sessions. This adjustment would not only cater to the formal aspects of the assembly but also create space for participants to unwind, fostering a more relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere. I feel striking a balance between the serious discussions and the need for leisure is something the youth executive who plan the event are doing well but could be improved. Youth assembly is a good platform for decision-making and being heard. **Jordan age 14.**

I enjoyed the creative workshop. I got to do some things with my friends I wouldn’t usually do so that was cool and fun. I had a good time worshipping it was very inspiring. I wish I was in drama as they looked extremely energetic, but I enjoyed my time. I think the food was excellent! However, one disappointment was too much of the Youth Decides. Being my first time at Youth assembly it was quite confusing, and I felt like it wasn’t explained well. I enjoyed the introductions and meeting new people. The people were very happy and smiley, and it was the best part of the place. Increased free time would be great and I wish I had slept more. **Teddy age 16.**

I wanted to start by saying thank you for having me at Youth Assembly. For my workshops I picked out songwriting (Sunday)and drama (Saturday). I enjoyed the drama workshop because it gave everyone the opportunity to step out of their comfort zone and have fun whilst also socialising with everyone else and build a sense of community amongst each other. I enjoyed my drama group a lot because I am a performing arts student, so I have to do it every day, but doing it in a different space with new inviting people made my experience a lot more memorable and fun.

When it came to the songwriting workshop, I was a bit lost with what was going on and I think it was because I came in late and when I came, I noticed that our instructor was giving us a structure on how to write a song. And as someone very interested in music, singing and performance, I think everybody works differently and there isn't really a specific way to write a song, but for beginners I understood his concept of starting off with writing words down to form a poem to get a clear flow but overall, this approach wasn't for me. I wish the whole group explored their different ways of approaching songs and writing including exploring past experiences, relationships, and inspiration.

My experience with business at Youth Assembly i.e., the sessions called Youth Decide, gives us young people a platform to voice any of our concerns and ideas of the church. However, I just feel as though it could have been made clearer, I also feel as though we could have been given a leaflet which showed what would be discussed in the youth decide meetings going into them. They were also quite long and tiring and I feel could have been completed in an online survey which wouldn't have taken nearly as long and gotten straight to the point. I also like the idea of an online survey because it leaves people anonymous to each other which could be beneficial to someone with stage fright who isn't comfortable with getting up in front of a hundred people plus a board of strangers, and talking about their concerns which would possibly make them feel vulnerable. **Isabel Okumu age 17.**

My experience at Youth Assembly for the first time was very enriching. The welcoming atmosphere meant it was easy to make friends, and every Christian that came to Youth Assembly had a unique story to them which I enjoyed getting to know. I really liked the fact that we were all there to have fun, but all shared a collective goal of trying to get closer to the Lord one day at a time.

I really enjoyed the packed timetable that was planned for us. It was full of fun, exciting workshops and entertaining activities as well as making time for dedicated worship. This year the theme was “story, story story” which I liked. Not to mention that our small group meetings were really helpful in allowing us to reflect and meditate on our personal lives through the word, I found it very refreshing. Within the choices of workshops there was a huge variety catered to different preferences. I really enjoyed “drama,drama,drama” because we could let loose and be silly, I also found the short film videos workshop very interesting and informative especially when we made our own short film videos on Tik Tok. In addition, I loved the Karaoke turned disco! By day 2 everyone knew everyone and was comfortable around people, so it was a great activity to do and get into to have fun.

By the end of Youth Assembly, I was appointed to represent our synod on Youth Executive which I proudly committed to and was grateful to the URC Moderator for formally welcoming and inducting me alongside my peers in the worship. I look forward to working closely with the other Youth Executives, Lorraine our CYDO and getting to know other young people in our synod, as well as fulfilling my own goals as Thames North Youth Representative, which is to develop children’s and young people’s personal relationship with God, whilst having fun. **Christine Ntim Thames North Synod Youth Representative.**