



THE METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND'S YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S STRATEGY

CONFERENCE 2023 PRESENTATION



THE METHODIST CHURCH
IN IRELAND



During 2021 and 2022 IMYC embarked on a research project called 'Exploring the land.' As we emerged from the pandemic, we recognised it was a key time for us as a church to consider how and what we would do to continue to develop our work with the next generation.

We were hearing of families not returning to church, a loss of connection with young people on the margins of church life, dwindling volunteer numbers and we sensed it was time to take stock, to explore the land.

We asked questions like; What is God asking of us? What are the opportunities? The challenges? Why do we want children and young people to be part of our church communities?

We carried out surveys and focus groups across the connexion. We were encouraged by the response to surveys and involvement in specific focus groups for parents, leaders/clergy and young people, alongside group and individual conversations with clergy.

Thank you to those of you who took part by filling in a survey or sourcing participants for focus groups or being part of one yourselves. Reports were written to capture the findings that informed a strategy development process. These reports will be available after conference in the MCI Resources section of [Microsoft Teams](#).



The strategy development process involved the Connexional Team, Connexional Youth and Children's advisory group and some key practitioners, including IMYC staff.

The resulting strategic priorities before us as a church today are 'ours' – and our hope is that we will all own this task of reaching and walking with young people and children, together.

On our Strategy development day in November, we considered the current context we find ourselves in. We don't need statistics to tell us we are getting smaller and older as a church.

We grieved together as we named our reality and considered vision.

THE CONTEXT



We considered that the world in which our young people and children are meaning making and testing values and beliefs is very different to the one many of us experienced, and we should not underestimate this difference. It is one of increasingly poor mental health, worries about the future and from the reports we could see that young people carry unique questions of purpose and a global perspective. The young people we spoke to wanted their church to care about – people who are struggling financially and with their wellbeing, the environment, the LGBTQ+ community, and future generations/young people.



4 in 10 Children
are 'very' or 'quite' worried
about the environment.



In 2019 the most desired job
for a 14 year old was to be a
'YouTuber'.



The top concern for 1000
young people surveyed in
Ireland was Mental Health.



1 in 9 Children
have low well-being.

THE DATA

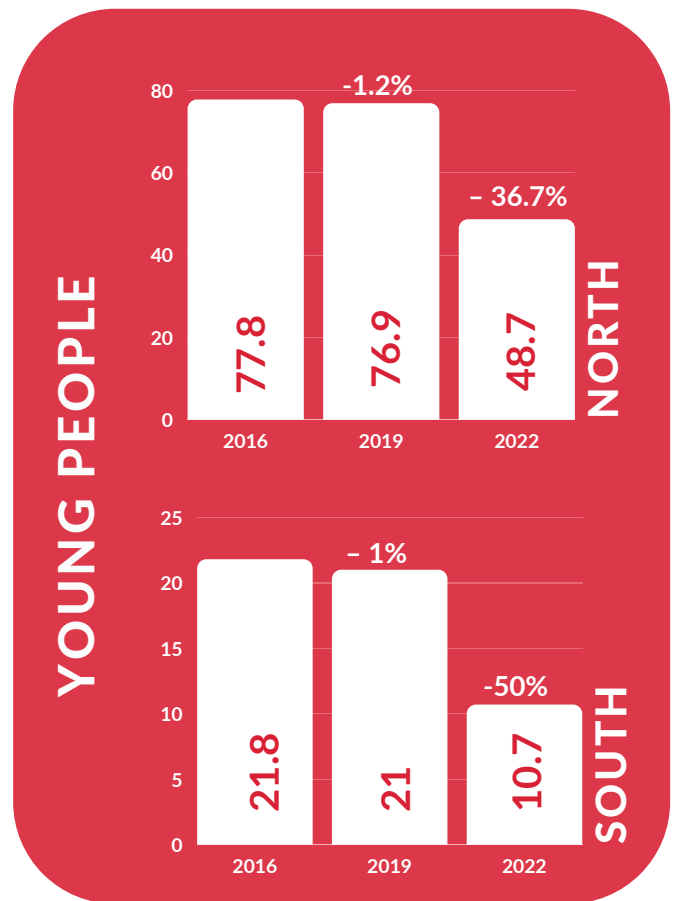
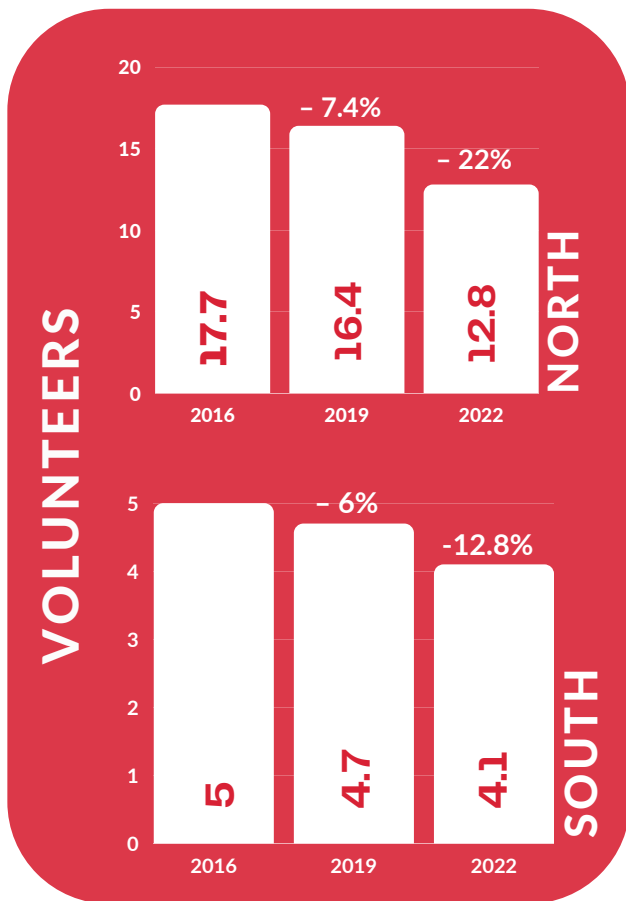


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Volunteer / Youth Statistics

We acknowledged the decline in numbers of children and young people connected with our churches and declining volunteer capacity, as illustrated by the data.



Please note: The 2022 figures are compared to the 2016 and 2019 Triennial Statistics.



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What are young people asking?

We recognised that the good news of Jesus has something to say to the significant questions young people are asking, questions of identity and worth, belonging and security and significance and purpose. We named the challenges for us as a church in engaging with young people and children in a way that enables them to grapple with these questions in the context of faith.

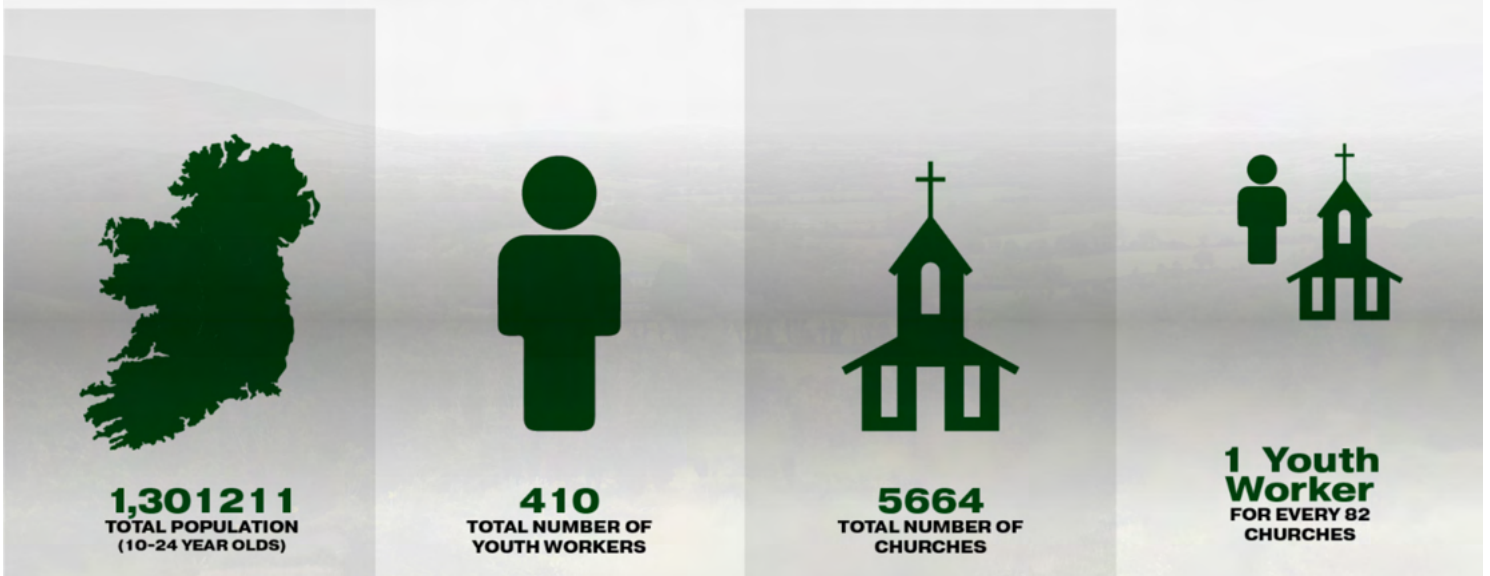
We also acknowledged that there are green shoots of growth, there are contexts where innovation is happening and great examples of churches walking with and connecting with young people and children. All of which should be celebrated.



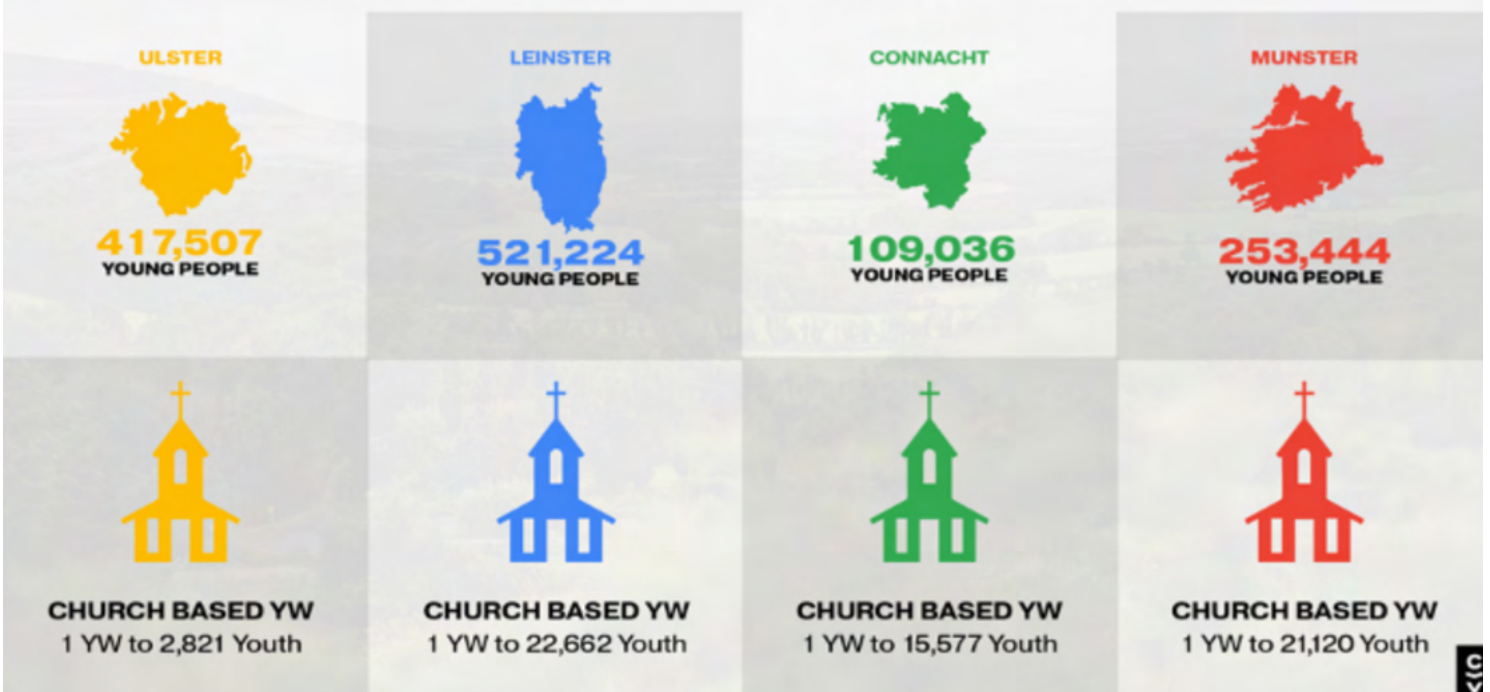
WIDER CONTEXT

We considered the wider context of the island of Ireland, with the help of some research carried out by Christ in Youth, and we acknowledged that we need more workers both employed and volunteer.

IRELAND DEMOGRAPHICS



PROVINCIAL POPULATION (10-24 YRS) PER CHURCH-BASED YOUTH WORKER



with thanks to Christ in Youth for the use of their images



We reminded ourselves that 84% of young people who choose to follow Jesus do so before the age of 25.

CONSIDERING VISION



We were so grateful to have Dr. Helen Warnock facilitate our process and the following is what she heard in terms of vision:

"Children and young people matter. We love them, we have a heart for them, and we carry a mission imperative to engage them."

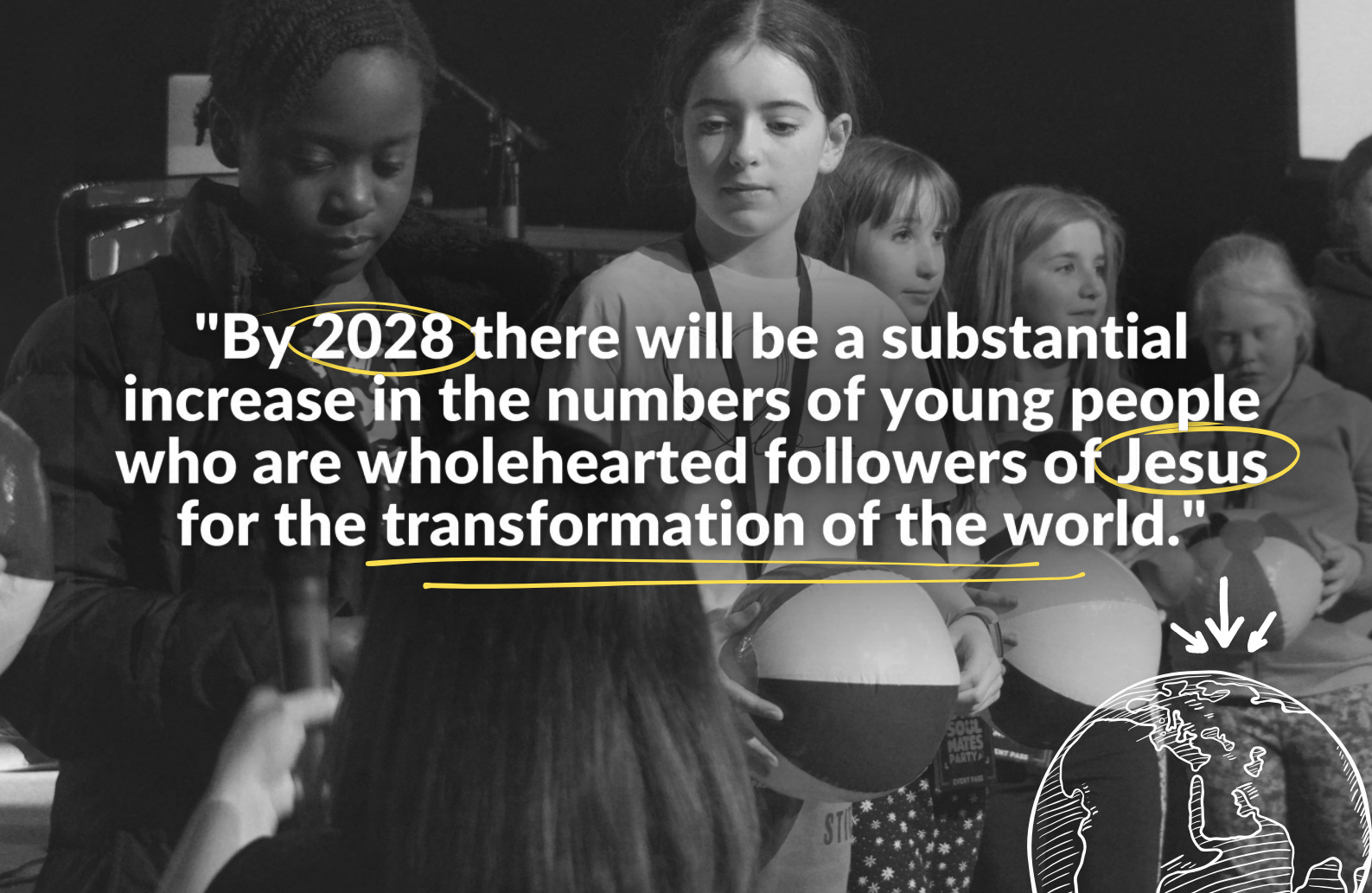
We carry a vision for a generation who will shine:

- Their passion for Jesus shines and is obvious to all around them
- They will recognise that at times they need to be counter cultural
- They will know their place in the intergenerational community of Jesus followers that is Methodism

We stand before God and acknowledge we need His help. We acknowledge we carry some sense of lament as to our current state, the state of the church and the home or lack of home that we are for children and young people. Though in all of this we know we care, as a church we care about children and young people; we believe children and young people matter and we want to speak well of them and for them. And so, we will show this in our priorities going forward and in the placing of our resources.

We considered what we needed to prioritise to see change – to be the spiritual home we believe God is asking us to be for the next generation.

We considered what would be our audacious goal! A goal that may feel beyond our reach but acknowledging that with God nothing is impossible!



"By 2028 there will be a substantial increase in the numbers of young people who are wholehearted followers of Jesus for the transformation of the world."



The Audacious Goal

"By 2028 there will be a substantial increase in the numbers of young people who are wholehearted followers of Jesus for the transformation of the world."

What do we mean by 'substantial'?

A substantial increase will mean the Methodist church in Ireland will look different due to the life and vitality young people and children bring as they live as disciples of Jesus, sharing their faith and heart.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Every Circuit strategy

Accompanying every circuit as they develop a strategy to enable them to be intentionally discipling and actively reaching young people and their families.

New Faith communities

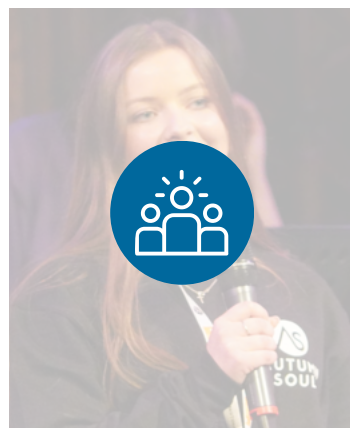
Pioneering new faith communities, whose primary goal it is to reach young people and their families.

Leaders who are young

Intentional passing on of leadership, engaging and releasing the under 25s into leadership that shapes the Methodist Church in Ireland.

Theological resourcing

We will be a church that is engaging and informing on cultural issues so that young people have safe spaces to process the issues and questions relevant to their world and stage of development.





This part of God's mission requires us all.

Although IMYC is tasked by the church to support and resource youth and children's ministry, this cannot be a piece of work that we are content to let IMYC get on with. This part of God's mission requires us all – requires a whole church approach...

In preparation for our strategy development day in November we were asked to read and pray through Nehemiah 1.

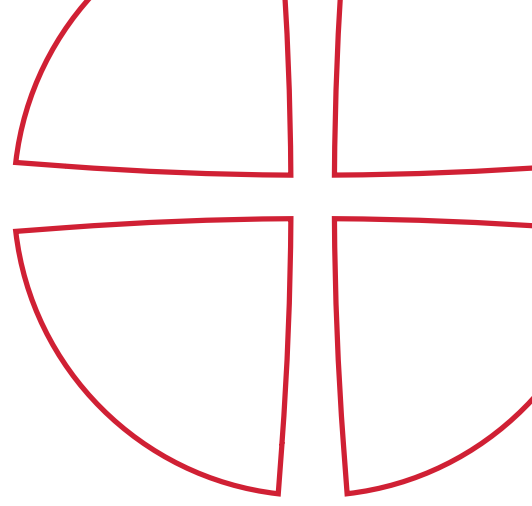
It begins with Nehemiah facing the reality of the state of Jerusalem's walls and he wept, prayed and fasted! His response displayed his heart.

But it also moved him to action – he did not stay in that place of lament – he did something about it, he choose to act to enable change.

The job to rebuild the walls was a whole family, whole community endeavour. Ch 3 is a great picture of the body of Christ at work, the whole people of God playing their part, taking their place... it wasn't just left to the priests or rulers or builders, the goldsmiths and perfume makers got to work too, the sons and the daughters, they didn't say that's not my skills, I can't do it, and hoped that someone else would do it, they joined in, very often in front of their own house.

Those who choose to work and volunteer specifically with young people and children can't do this on their own, this is a whole church mission.

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WHAT EXCITES YOU?

**WHAT DO YOU THINK
OUR CHALLENGES
WILL BE?**

