

THE SERVICE OF YOUTH

## Some Experiences of the Government's Scheme

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From a Northern Parish.

Surely there is no more precious part of our ministry than that among the children and young people. To help our boys and girls through the difficult period of adolescence and to help them to find the true purpose in life, by leading them to see in Christ their Saviour and to determine to live henceforth for Him.

Yet, in spite of the importance of this work, in the past far too many parishes have been content to maintain that which has been, without question as to whether it is meeting the need or as to whether the work could not be extended. Unfortunately also, what has been done has usually been the responsibility of a few enthusiasts who have seen the vision of future generations of Christians and Church People in these young people, while the majority of the congregations and even of the Parochial Church Councils have held aloof or been loud in their criticism of what others were not doing. And in those parishes where such bands of enthusiasts have been available they have often had to face a heavy burden of financial responsibility for their Scouts or Guides or Brigade or Club. This has usually hindered development and made the effort of the Church of Christ compare very unfavourably with that of the secular authorities. The present writer is not by any means suggesting that we should set ourselves out to compete with them, but we must remember the effect upon the minds of our young people. For there is a great deal of point for us in this work in the word of the Master - "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of Light" (Luke xvi. 8). Young People who have been accustomed to well heated and lighted school buildings, complete with all the necessities for P.T., games, etc. are not attracted by the dull places into which the Church of Christ would oftentimes seek to draw them for their spiritual good, where there is nearly always an insufficiency of the barest necessities, where books are often in tatters, plaster falls from the ceilings and so on. Small wonder that they are inclined to despise it all and prefer the darkness of the street outside.

With the coming of the war the problem increased. How was it possible in war conditions to do what had not been possible in peace? How raise the money and put some of these matters right and so at least have something worthy to offer?

Help came from an unexpected source. The Government decided that the youth of the land must be provided for, and recognised the splendid work put in by the national youth organisations. It provided money to help their development. It said, in effect, "You have struggled on without any help in a work which we now recognise to be of first rate national importance. We are now ready to help you to develop and extend your present work by relieving you of the burdens of financial stringency and lack of accommodation." Provided help and training is given to these young people along educational and recreational lines, no restrictions are placed upon any plans or conditions with regard to Church or Bible Class attendance which the promoters may see fit to impose, nor is any objection raised if the Club or Brigade is not open to all comers.

In the parish with which the writer is concerned at present there was nothing for boys and virtually nothing for girls. There was nothing to which the workers could invite the young people in their visiting, nor any effective means of retaining them as they left Sunday School, as most did at the age of 14. The Young Men's Bible Class was often non-existent, while the Girls' Class was considered well attended if eight were present.





Enquiries were made with regard to suitable organisations for both sexes. The Vicar desired that they should be definitely Christian organisations and also, if possible, definitely Church of England. He found the conditions fulfilled for the boys in the Church Lads' Brigade; but, being unable to find a similar one for the girls, the choice fell upon the Girls' Life Brigade. In other parishes the former had already proved its worth in retaining the older lad, and the latter was chosen because of its emphasis on the spiritual side of the work.

At once it was realised that the big problem was how these two companies could be financed in a parish already committed up to the hilt in other directions. There were uniforms, equipment, heating and lighting and so on to be provided.

Application was accordingly made to the local Youth Committee (this is the responsibility of the local Council) for grants towards the initial expenses, and eventually, after a great deal of delay probably largely due to the newness of the machinery, two grants of £20 each were made. These have enabled us to go ahead and provide ourselves with equipment for games and P.T. etc, as well as relieving the parish of the expense incurred by extra lighting and heating.

The result on the purely material side is that after twelve months two companies are firmly established and increasing in usefulness. On the spiritual side it has meant that the Young Men's Bible Class is overcrowded and new accommodation is needed, and the Girls' Bible Class has similarly grown. Both have already been the means of leading boys and girls to a knowledge of the Saviour and have provided the parish with urgently needed Sunday School Teachers.

Surely there never has been an opportunity like this, and yet, from the writer's experience, so few of the clergy are awake to the opportunity presented to them in this way. By contrast the writer is struck by the boldness of the promoters of secular clubs, etc. in coming forward to ask the Youth Grants Committee (of which he is a member) for large capital grants for improvements and extensions to premises and equipment.

A word or two of warning may be necessary. Grants are for extension work, they are not usually given for the maintenance of existing work, and secondly it is necessary to produce satisfactory evidence that the work for which help is asked is actually being done. It is useless to apply for grants for nebulous schemes which may never be realised. They must be fully planned and details provided as to the estimated first cost and maintenance.

How important is the position to-day can be judged when it is realised that every young person between the ages of 16 and 18, who will shortly be registering, will be required to state to what youth organisation, branch of Civil Defence or junior branch of the Services they belong, and that all those who do not belong to anything worth while will be interviewed by representatives of the Board of Education and 'encouraged' to join (in the case of boys) either the Cadet Corps, the Sea Cadets or the A.T.C.

Inevitably many will prefer to join our organisations. Are we prepared to receive them? Have we the facilities to offer them? Opportunity is knocking loudly at our door just now, even though it is to be regretted that the Government have tempered their financial help by a refusal to relieve the position created by the great difficulties in obtaining uniforms.

Let us plan big, and let us take our place in this great national scheme. There is yet time. There is far less opposition than there was to the spiritual side of our work. We have more friends than we always realise amongst those who have to administer the scheme. One man most unexpectedly said to the writer recently "If we leave out the spiritual message, if we do not seek to get these young people to Jesus, all we shall succeed in doing with our P.T., games, and clubs will be to produce healthier animals."

The future of England, the future of the world, is bound up in this matter. The young people of to-day will be the leaders and rulers of to-morrow. Let us then be up and doing. Let us away with the idea that we must not have anything to do with these things. Or, when it is too late, we shall wake up to find that while we slept another has come and bought up our inheritance.



### From a London Parish

Full co-operation, or complete failure to "redeem the time" - these seem to be the two alternatives which are open to the leaders of Youth work in the Churches in their attitude towards the Government Youth Movement. At the moment the Government is extremely helpful and is giving the Church, and other voluntary organisations (Scouts, Guides, etc.) the opportunity to be leaders in the new movement - and therein lies an opportunity to guide the young people of our land into the way of Christ. But if we fail now to respond to the invitation so openly given us, there is no saying what new youth scheme might be evolved and put into operation without references to the Churches.

In this district of South London the Church has endeavoured to co-operate as fully as possible with the new movement - and we believe the results have fully justified our action. A long established "Junior Organisation Committee" developed into the "Borough Youth Committee" when the new scheme was launched, and the Church was well represented on that Committee. On the Committee as it stands to-day, a Free Church Minister and a Roman Catholic lay-woman were elected to fill the two statutorily prescribed places for representatives of "other youth organisations" (i.e., purely local organisations) and three others were co-opted on to the Committee - a second Free Church Minister, an Anglican parson (the Youth Convener for the Deanery, who was elected Treasurer of the Committee) and a Roman Catholic Priest. Besides these there are Christian representatives of Scouts, Guides, etc. With such representatives it is possible on the one hand for the Christian Church to have a substantial say in all schemes that are put forward, and on the other hand for all the Churches to be kept advised as to any fresh developments, so that they can always be "in at the start". This has shewn its value in two ways especially.

It was suggested at the Youth Committee that a meeting of the young people (between 14 and 20) themselves should be called, so that they could say what were their hopes and desires with regard to the new movement. Representatives from each Youth Organisation in the Borough were asked to attend the meeting. The Youth Convener immediately let each fellowship in the Churches know of the meeting and urged that representatives should be sent to it, with the result that at the meeting the majority present were Christian Young People, who could, and did, make a good witness for their Master. As a result of that meeting a Youth Advisory Committee of the 14-20's has been formed of which the Chairman is a real Christian of one Fellowship, the Secretary is the member of another, and at least two on the Committee are keen Christian members of two other Fellowships. There lies their opportunity.

A second venture of the Borough Youth Committee was to produce an enamel "Youth" sign to be displayed wherever there were Youth Organisations, and to publish and distribute a leaflet drawing the attention of the Young people to the new Youth Movement and to the sign. Once again the Churches were in at the start and those which had youth organisations were displaying the "Youth" sign within a very short time. One Church also, having obtained permission, printed on the back of the official leaflet, details of their own youth work, and distributed it to every house in the Parish.

That briefly, is how the Church in this district has tried to co-operate with the new movement. Is such co-operation valuable. What have been the results. It may be said from the beginning that nothing startling has happened - nor indeed should we expect it to. Christ compared the growth of His Kingdom to the growth of a plant - slow but sure; and our Youth work must grow like that. But there have been definite benefits.

First, there is a real confidence felt by the local Youth Committee in the Youth work of the Churches. They are now alive to the fact that the Church is awake and ready to do its part in their new schemes. At the Annual Youth Conference the Chairman paid a notable compliment to the work of the Churches by saying that they alone seemed to be alive. The Organising Secretary of the Committee attended a gathering of the young people of the Churches and was evidently impressed by their number and quality. In any plans that are made, it is felt that the opinion of



Christian representatives will be seriously considered and it is certain that every help will be given to Christian organisations. For instance, it is probable that as a consequence of the registration of the 16s to 18s young people who, at the moment, do not belong to any organisation, will be advised to join a Church Fellowship if they shew that they prefer that to some pre-service training corps. This is purely a result of the fact that the Church has shewn itself alive and willing to co-operate.

With regard to finance; once again the Borough Committee has been extremely helpful to the Churches. Since it was formed nine grants have been given to Church Organisations. One Youth Fellowship which has just been started, in spite of some opposition, would not have been able to open so successfully without the help given to it by the Committee. As it is, it is now a healthy fellowship, which shews its life by its growth. Besides these small grants, two larger grants have been made to two Churches by the London County Council through the Borough Committee. One of these has enabled a Club for young lads "off the streets" to be developed on sound Christian lines, and this has resulted in a number of conversions. This class had already had a grant of £5 towards equipment for a camp which was held in the summer. It has also a Physical Training Instructor supplied by the London County Council and has been inspected by an L.C.C. Inspector who shewed himself keenly interested in the spiritual work done and also gave valuable suggestions, without in any way seeking to force his will, or the will of any "authority" on the way it was run. All the officials have been willing to give continual help and advice.

At the moment, only one Club has been opened by the Youth Committee, outside the scope of the Churches; but that is mainly for girls, and the running of it has been handed over to the Y.W.C.A. The Churches and Free Churches of the Borough are in the process of forming a Christian Council which will, we hope, be able to co-operate fully in the formation of any new Youth Centres, and is indeed considering the advisability of opening one or more such centres itself - with the help of the L.C.C. - so relieving the Youth Committee of the necessity to do so, and at the same time retaining the influence of the Church of Christ.

Such is our experience in this district. Everybody at the moment is working very much in the dark as the full scope and implications of the new movement are not yet realised. But it seems that St. Paul's call "to redeem the time because the days are evil" is very relevant to-day, and that as far as the young people are concerned, here is a God-given opportunity to save many from the evil of the times. It will probably mean some re-organisation of our youth work, and certainly much labour and initiative. But as long as we remain faithful to the fundamental teachings and claims of Christ, and work with vision, we have nothing to fear from any purely secular organisations, but may indeed see Christ's Kingdom mightily extended amongst the young people of our land.

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#### EDITORIAL NOTES.

There are still a large number of members who have not renewed their subscription to the Fellowship for the current year.

As the continuance of the monthly papers very largely depends upon the numbers subscribing it is earnestly hoped that those who have not yet renewed will do so as early as possible.

The Editor is grateful for the many expressions of appreciation of the papers so far provided and will always welcome criticisms and suggestions for improving the usefulness of the Fellowship.

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