

## International Youth Day

Today is International Youth Day. This annual event was set up in 1999 by the General Assembly of the United Nations to give an opportunity to celebrate young people's views and initiatives. The theme of the 2016 International Youth Day is "The Road to 2030: Eradicating Poverty and Achieving Sustainable Consumption and Production". It is about achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and focuses on the leading role of young people in ensuring the eradication of poverty and achieving sustainable development through sustainable consumption and production.

To quote from the United Nations website: "Sustainable consumption entails the use of products and services that meet the basic needs of communities while safeguarding the needs of future generations. The development and promotion of individual choices and actions that increase the eco-efficiency of consumption of all and minimize waste and pollution is critical to achieving equitable socioeconomic development. Yet, many young men and women face barriers to certain green consumption choices. Those barriers to sustainable consumption choices include the high prices of goods and services and a lack of information about the available choices."

It is a cliché but no less true that our young people are our future. Sadly young people often get a bad press. We hear about those involved in crime and gangs. There are often letters in the local press complaining about student houses, and those of us who are older may not appreciate that certain rebellious streak which does not always respect authority and accepted ideas.

But in fact there are a lot of talented young people who do contribute much to society in general, and to local communities in particular. And it is good that they do often question and challenge accepted views, however uncomfortable that may be. The voices of young people do need to be heard and listened to and this United Nations initiative is one way of encouraging that.

The Bible reading we just heard (Joel 2.23-32) may seem an odd choice. And yet the prophet's hope for restoration after disaster is one that can still speak to us today. It reminds us of the need to manage our natural resources wisely and to be good stewards of our environment, which is God's creation. Not only that but we must ensure that the world's resources are made available to all people across the world. They are to be enjoyed not simply by the rich nations of the West. For peace and justice can only be achieved when all enjoy at the very least all the basic necessities of life. And the insights and contributions of young people are so valuable in achieving all this.

And our passage contains those marvellous verses: "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions." May they continue to do so.

*12 August 2016  
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