

Auckland Diocesan Youth Synod



On Sunday the 22nd of April I attended the Catholic Youth Diocesan Synod as a representative of Edmund Rice Justice. It was held at St Peter's College. The purpose of this Synod was responding to the call made by Pope Francis, asking for young people to assist in shaping the church of today and the future.

Groups split off into teams and aimed to look at central topics, discussing our ideas for the

church of the future and our solutions to some of the problems. There were over 100 different groups, ranging from faith communities, parishes and schools from all over the country. The central theme of the Synod was to 'Be Courageous. Take Risks', with facilitators emphasising that 'nothing is off the table', when discussing ideas about the future of the church.

The topics discussed 'The Catholic Faith community and our place in the wider world', 'Liturgical celebrations' and 'Faith Communities'. For each group an elected speaker discussed the solutions for problems such as how to get more people to Church, how to appear Christ-like in the secular world', as well as looking at how to provide faith education outside of the liturgy and build a stronger sense of community.

Campbell Wood Project Officer – Edmund Rice Justice Trust

Loki's Story

With over thirty years' experience as a lawyer Helen Bowen is very familiar with the day to day routine in the Criminal Justice System, in particular the District Courts. Stepping aside for a moment from details associated with this rigid system, its bureaucracy and all too often tragic narratives, Helen shares a humanising story about an encounter with one of her client's. As an advocate for youth, Helen seeks to know what lies at the heart of each young person she represents. Loki's story raises a number of poignant themes for readers to consider.



I met him yesterday. He came into my office with a hang-dog look. He was young – maybe mid-twenties. He had curly hair, an open face and smiling eyes. He told me about his life – that his mum and brother lived in Germany and that his dad and step-mum lived here. He also made it plain that he did not feel welcome at either home, even though he clearly loved both strands of his family.

A sadness was etched into his young face and also a naïve wonderment. He was cross with himself for being pulled up in a stolen car but did not want to involve his mate who had children and did not need the stress.

He also felt bad that his dog was in the car – he blamed himself for putting the animal in this predicament. Not your average criminal, I thought.

Last year he tried living on the streets because he wanted to understand why street-people did this. He said he learned a lot over the four months but found that their addictions got the better of them. He said it was dangerous but that he and his dog did okay.

Yet he remained curious about why the street-people chose this option even though some were given the opportunity to move into permanent accommodation. Eventually Loki moved into a house out west.

He liked to visit his six year old step brother who lived in a nice part of town. He wanted to do Guy Fawkes with him but his step-mum would not allow it. Dad was a businessman, he said, a go-getter who was not really interested in spending time with his eldest son.

Loki had saved up money for the fireworks and spent all week looking forward to having fun with his little brother. He was pretty gutted when it didn't happen. I suggested that he just take him to a playground sometime.

Since his teens he had always liked cannabis but he failed to see the connection between his cannabis habit and the two head injuries he had suffered. While was crossing a street near K Road he dropped a cigarette. When he bent down to retrieve it a car swung around the corner.

He does not remember much except that he spent six weeks in hospital. In fact, he had not been able to remember a lot since then and was now on an Invalid's Benefit. The next injury occurred when he was chasing his dog in the suburbs. He had drunk some beers and was excited that he seemed to be able to run faster than the dog.

This was all he was thinking of and so he did not see the waist-high metal bar until he slammed headfirst into it.

I suggested to him that maybe cannabis and alcohol had something to do with these accidents. But he was not convinced.

He had come to Court with his dog and needed to go downstairs to make sure that it was okay.

We talked some more about his future, his debt and his love of his dog. His name was then called and he wandered into Court.

Afterwards I walked with him to meet his dog and he proudly showed me the golden Labrador/ husky tied up outside the court with a bright purple lead. When the dog saw its owner it made a sound like a wolf – not really a bark – more of a deep-sounding yelp of joy. It looked at him adoringly.

Loki said that the dog should be charged too as it was in the car when it was stolen. The good news is that he wants to learn animation at university. He visibly perked up when talking about his love of the subject.

I gave him some legal advice and sent him on his way. “I wish more lawyers were like you,” he said.

Helen Bowen is a criminal barrister, youth advocate and AODTC lawyer. In 2000 (with Jim Boyack) she was contracted by the then Department for Courts to provide training for 80 community restorative justice facilitators in four courts in New Zealand. Since then, she has provided RJ training services nationally and internationally, including working with the Thames Valley Police in London and community groups in Northern Ireland. She continues to provide professional development and supervision with Auckland RJ provider groups and specialises in the area of Health and Safety RJ conferences in Work Safe prosecutions

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