

## **New Year Message from the Archbishop of Canterbury**

In reflecting on the events of the summer which showed us "a face of our society we don't like to think about - angry, destructive, lawless", Dr Williams urges us to recognise that this destruction was the work of a minority and that most of the young people of their generation "strongly shared the general feeling of dismay at this behaviour".

On a visit to Kids Company in south London, Archbishop Rowan Williams talked with some of the young people, witnessing not only their energy in helping those less fortunate than themselves but also their determination to make something of their own lives - and how charities such as Kids Company are helping them:

"When you see the gifts they can offer, the energy that can be released when they feel safe and loved, you see what a tragedy we so often allow to happen. Look at the work done by groups like the Children's Society or by the astonishing network of Kids Company here in London, and you see what can be done to wake up that energy and let it flourish for everyone's good."

Finally, the Archbishop urges us to recognise how our own actions can make a real difference to society:

"... being grown-up doesn't mean forgetting about the young. And a good New Year's Resolution might be to think what you can do locally to support facilities for young people, to support opportunities for counselling and learning and enjoyment in a safe environment. And above all, perhaps we should just be asking how we make friends with our younger fellow citizens – for the sake of our happiness as well as theirs."

### **A transcript of the Archbishop's message is below:**

Quite a lot of the images we're likely to remember from the footage of the riots in the summer will be of young people out of control in the streets, walking off with looted property from shops, noisily confronting police and so on. It all feeds into the national habit of being suspicious and hostile when we see groups of youngsters on street corners or outside shops and bus shelters. We walk a bit more quickly and hope we can pass without some sort of confrontation.

The events of the summer were certainly horrific. They showed us a face of our society we don't like to think about – angry, destructive, lawless. But it's crucial to remember that what we saw on the streets in August was just one facet of a bigger and much more heartbreaking problem. The youngsters out on the streets may have looked like a big crowd, but they are a minority of their generation – the minority whose way of dealing with their frustrations was by way of random destructiveness and irresponsibility. Most people of their own age strongly shared the general feeling of dismay at this behaviour.

I've come to visit the charity Kids Company in London where today a lot of young people are joining together to pack food parcels for needy families in the neighbourhood. When you have a chance of talking to young people like this you really get a sense of how they feel about the society they're in and the challenges they face.

We have to ask, what kind of society is it that lets down so many of its young people? That doesn't provide enough good role models and drives youngsters further into unhappiness and anxiety by only showing them suspicion and negativity. When you see the gifts they can offer, the energy that can be released when they feel safe and loved, you see what a tragedy we so often allow to happen. Look at the work done by groups like the Children's Society or by the astonishing network of Kids Company here in London, and you see what can be done to wake up that energy and let it flourish for everyone's good.

One of the unique things in the Christian faith, one of its great contributions to our moral vision, is the way it has spoken about children and young people. Whether it's Jesus blessing children, or St Paul encouraging a young church leader, saying, 'Don't let people look down on you because you're young', or St Benedict in his rule for monks saying that you need to pay attention to the youngest as well as the oldest – Christian faith has underlined the essential importance of giving young people the respect they deserve.

Of course they're not infallible; of course they have a lot to learn. So do we all. But being grown-up doesn't mean forgetting about the young. And a good New Year's Resolution might be to think what you can do locally to support facilities for young people, to support opportunities for counselling and learning and enjoyment in a safe environment. And above all, perhaps we should just be asking how we make friends with our younger fellow citizens – for the sake of our happiness as well as theirs. A very happy and blessed New Year to you all.

Dr. Rowan Williams Archbishop of Canterbury - BBC