



empowering young people

**IMPLEMENTING A VISION
FOR CATHOLIC YOUTH MINISTRY**

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SAMPLE

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I would like to thank in a particular way the young people of the Australian Province who have certainly challenged me, helped to form me and encouraged me in my faith journey. The invitation by Garratt Publishing to write this book has offered me a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the past 12 years of working with young people. The reflections and wisdom in this book is the combined faith and effort of many young people that have been part of Oblate Youth Australia.

I would also like to thank Ms Loretta Brinkman, Mr Daniel Kelly and Fr Oswald Firth OMI for their assistance in editing.

Preface

There may be a number of reasons why you have picked up this book, which focuses on working with young people in the Catholic tradition. Whatever may be the reason you are reading this book, it is likely that you are interested in the journey of young people as humans and as people of faith.

There are two important things you need to continue reading this book: a genuine openness and love for young people, their culture and varied ways and a high level of enthusiasm. The key word above is genuine. Your age doesn't matter a great deal but young people will pick up a non-genuine person very quickly. Be yourself, be genuine with your talents and faults. You are not perfect; you're working towards that like everyone else.

So – if you feel brave enough to keep on reading, bring your genuine care for young people along to explore the issues you and your co-workers will encounter on your journey in youth ministry.



SAMPLE

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Introduction

Empowering Young People: Implementing a Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry has been written with youth ministry in parish communities in the Australian context in mind. There is a great need for leaders in this essential part of the church's mission, and their formation and training are of crucial importance.

This book has three main aims: first, to present a clear definition and theological underpinning for a comprehensive approach to youth ministry in the Catholic Church in Australia; second, to provide material for the development of a youth vision for a parish community and thirdly, formation material and practical ideas for the use of those involved in youth ministry.

The concepts and ideas in this book will be easily adaptable for religious congregations and ecclesial movements. It may even prove to be a valuable tool for local parish communities who might be working together between parishes and local Catholic secondary schools.

There are many models that one might use to fulfill the needs that exist in the parish community for young people. This book will explore fulfilling this need within a parish, diocese or religious order through the model of youth ministry.

The book is in three main parts. They follow a structure that is based on the vision of the three main goals of youth ministry as contained in the document *Anointed and Sent*, a publication initiated by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and published by the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life in July 2009.

Following this framework, *Empowering Young People* expands on the document's concepts. Its main aim is to be a useful resource for all those who work in youth ministry.

Part 1 expands on the Concept of Youth Ministry and provides supporting arguments to answer the question of why youth ministry is needed, relating these to *Anointed and Sent*'s Goal 1: 'to foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each person'.

Part 2 (Beginning of Reality) is based on *Anointed and Sent*: Goal 2, which is 'to draw young people into responsible participation in the life, mission and work of the Catholic faith community'.

Part 3 is based on Goal 3 in *Anointed and Sent*, expanding on its Formation Program – *Empowering Young People* '... to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today.'

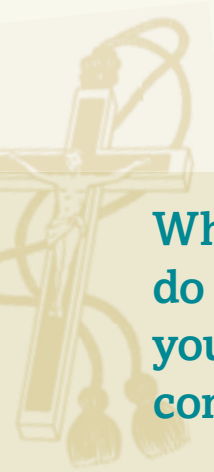
It is hoped that this book will become a useful reference for all who work in youth ministry.

'To foster the personal and spiritual
growth of each young person'

(Anointed and Sent, Goal 1)

The Concept of Youth Ministry





Why is it important to do something specific for young people in a Catholic community?

It might seem an obvious or even somewhat ridiculous question to ask but it needs an answer. If you are new to working as a leader or advocate for young people you may be surprised to find that you will have to answer this question. It may not be asked overtly, it may be subtly implied, but at some point you will eventually be asked to justify why there is a need for special attention for young people.

While you might have boundless enthusiasm for young people and youth ministry, not everyone in the parish will share the same level of enthusiasm. It's not unusual to find that some parish members who seemed to be supportive at first become less friendly to the idea of youth ministry if it causes them to have to change their ways even slightly. It's important then for you to be able to articulate briefly and clearly just why youth ministry is so crucially important in the life of the Church.

Parish life varies dramatically throughout Australia but it would be fair to say that they are busy places caring for the faith, sacramental and social needs of people from the womb to the tomb. The parish becomes most important to most Catholics at key moments in their lives such as baptisms, marriages, First Communions, Confirmations and funerals. The high points of the liturgical year such as Christmas and Easter also draw in more than the regular committed and devout members of the community. For the great majority of Catholics, it is the key stages on the journey from womb to the tomb that draw them to the parish community. It becomes the place to celebrate certain rituals and rites of passage that are important within the Catholic culture.

These moments offer a unique opportunity for evangelisation, formation, conversion and catechesis. At these moments our faith is challenged and formed in a new way: these experiences and the contact with the community encourages us to continue our commitment to active participation in the life of the Community. It is not surprising then that the group that is most obviously missing from the parish Community (youth and young adults in the 16–35 age bracket) has no major life sacrament or rite of passage to link them with the parish Community. In the 2008 Australian Catholic Bishops Conference report we find that:

Although an average of 13.8 per cent of all people who identify as Catholics in the Census attended Mass each week in May 2006, ... this attendance rate is not constant across age groups. The highest attendance rate (36%) was among Catholics aged 75–79, in contrast to Catholics aged 15 through to 39 years, where fewer than ten per cent (10%) attended each week.²

Some may argue that Catholic education is catering for this group of young people. This raises a few issues in itself, for not all young Catholic people attend Catholic Schools. And what happens to young people once they have finished high school education and before they settle down and start moving on to the next phase of life?

With the current trend of leaving marriage to later in life, this age group has grown in number. In simple terms, young persons and young adults are in a period of transition and mostly feel they have no need for the church community until they are ready to get married and begin their own families. It's common to find that a young person, once active in the church community, no longer feels the need for connection to the community or to continue participating any more.

Since it is the rites of passage above all that draw less-committed members back to the liturgical celebrations, we have a particular problem regarding young people. With no obvious rite of passage, sacrament or task to achieve for this specific group, a parish needs to address the challenge urgently – or that group (and the whole community) misses out. Necessity often drives our action and likewise channels our resources. And with Church resources spread so thinly in parishes in most cases, the sad fact is that this group certainly does miss out.

In general terms, parish life seems to be well set up for children and young families and the consistent older community, but the young people are largely forgotten or put in the too-hard basket. The challenge that every parish community faces is to find ways of engaging young people and allowing them to find their space in the church community. To do this, we need to start tapping into the faith they already have – giving them a community that is meaningful for them to be part of.

The invitation to take an active part in a community of faith is the greatest gift we have to offer young people. Where it occurs, it demonstrates a healthy understanding of what a human being is and shows care for that human being in providing a healthy place where they can encounter Jesus Christ.

Another important thing to remember is that the presence of young people in the parish community is not about the future of the Church and should not be motivated by this but it is all about the present church. An active community of young people in a parish community has the ability to transform the community and is a unique gift to the Church.

If we engage this minority group (which also happens to be the target group for World Youth Day) it has an incredible energy for reigniting or re-evangelising the whole community. The presence of young people active in their faith and in the community is a living witness to the Good News and for many parishioners it is good news in a practical sense.



... parish life seems to be well set up for children and young families and the consistent older community, but the young people are largely forgotten or put in the too-hard basket.



This living witness gives a sense of hope for the older members of the community. Seeing young people active in their faith ignites their own. The presence of young people in the parish community challenges us older Catholics to drop our complacency about our faith. It also gives the natural comfort of knowing that there is a new generation stepping up. In a similar way the group becomes a witness for younger people, models to emulate and a group they wish to be part of when they get older. In a similar way in which the Word of God is spoken about in the scriptures, ministry with young people is a little like a 'two-edged sword' (Heb 4:12).

Young people are often the most difficult people to reach and the most challenging to keep involved but there are great rewards to be found in energising and engaging them. The challenge of doing something to involve young people can be daunting at times but the obvious need should increase our enthusiasm to persevere. We can't compete with the busyness of life, but we can continue to offer something different – a healthy encounter with Christ through community.

So, when you are asked why we should put energy and resources into young people in the parish community, here are two simple answers:

- first, we are addressing an obvious need for a specific group in the community and
- second, the benefits will outweigh any costs.

DEFINING THE GENERATIONS

In defining the generations, a number of factors have been taken into account including birth rates, significant world events and shared life experiences. Each generation covers a similar-sized age group (generally 20 years) to allow more meaningful comparisons across generations. For example, Generation X and Y, while separately identified by some social commentators, have many characteristics in common and have been combined to form a 20-year birth cohort. It should be noted that there is no widespread agreement about the names and definitions of these generations. Furthermore, the names adopted in this report have been used by other commentators to refer to slightly different groups divided by years of birth.⁵

| | |
|-----------|-----------------------------|
| 1900–1924 | Oldest Generation |
| 1925–1946 | Lucky Generation |
| 1947–1966 | Baby Boomers |
| 1967–1986 | X & Y Generation |
| 1987– | iGeneration or Z Generation |

If your youth ministry targets the 16–35 year old age bracket this would mean that within your ministry you will be catering for young people born between 1976 and 1995. This roughly 20-year bracket would include young people from the X, Y and the i- or Z Generation.