

Australian Catholic Youth

SAMPLE

**Theological and Pastoral Foundations
for Faithful Ministry**

Edited by Fr Christian Fini OMI
and Fr Christopher Ryan MGL

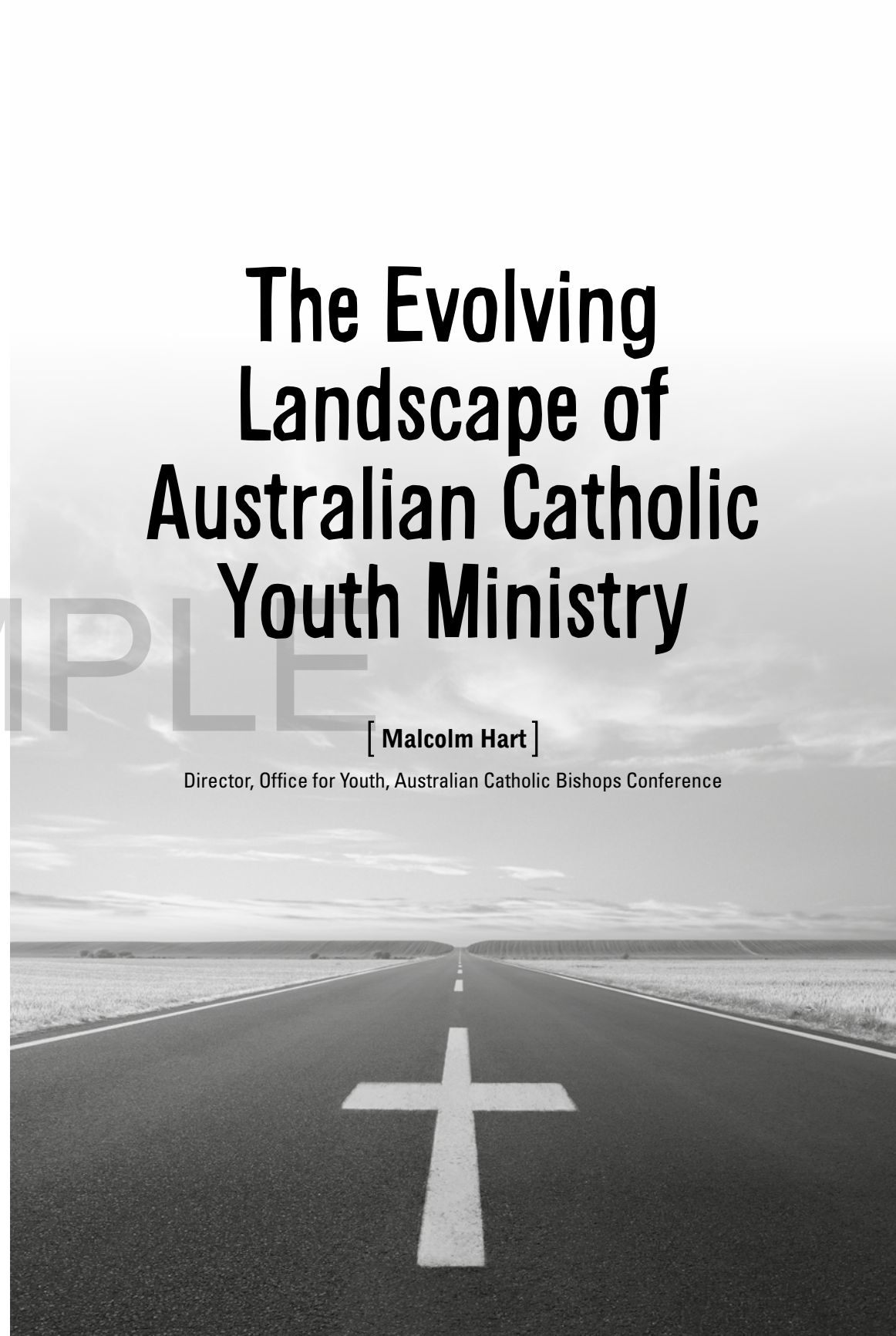


The Evolving Landscape of Australian Catholic Youth Ministry

SAMPLE

[Malcolm Hart]

Director, Office for Youth, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference



[Chapter overview]

For the past 20 years, the World Youth Day (WYD) phenomenon has muscled its way into the Australian youth ministry landscape. Welcomed or otherwise, it has become a significant part of the Australian youth ministry story, affording the Church in this country with many lessons, mistakes, gifts and unprecedented opportunities.

This chapter gives a description of WYD and its significance in the world, its timeliness at this moment in the life of the international Church and the local impact it has had.

[Recent History]

*“The Catholic Church in Australia has a rich history of ministry with young people”.*¹ This history continues to shape current contexts and approaches to youth ministry in Australia, and can help to navigate future pathways that will evangelise and catechise young people so that they may fulfil their baptismal call to mission.

The following brief examination of youth ministry’s development since Vatican II highlights important developments in the growth of youth ministry in Australia. These developments identify important influences and provide insights into the current landscape of youth ministry in Australia.

Since Vatican II, there has been a more concerted effort to evangelise youth.

In Australia the Church’s engagement with young people has traditionally been through education, which was initially a manifestation of mission and service to the marginalised. Since Vatican II, however, a more concerted effort has taken place to evangelise youth and draw them into the worshipping community. We can broadly highlight several phases in the youth ministry journey since 1960, with each phase seeing the development of a particular response or strategic effort. Each new phase drew upon previous efforts and deepened the experiences and resources of Australian youth ministry.

1960s and 1970s – Vatican II and the Cardijn Movements (YCS/YCW)

The 1960s and 1970s were times of considerable change as society, particularly young people, challenged the political, cultural and religious status quo. Catholic schools (usually run and staffed by religious institutes) were a prominent part of church life, forming the primary pathway for the Church’s engagement with youth. With Vatican II, however, a profound shift occurred in the life of the Church, which in turn greatly affected her ministry with young people.

Although established in Australia the 1930s, the Jocists or Cardijn movements in Australia saw the peak of their involvement and impact

in these decades. The Young Christian Workers (YCW) and Young Christian Students (YCS) invited young people to gather together and discuss their life in light of Gospel values using the *See, Judge, Act* methodology². These movements had a very strong focus upon social action, encouraging participants to respond to local injustices. YCS/YCW groups were to be found in nearly every parish, but were also part of wider communities as the movement developed social and sporting groups where young people could participate in everyday life while maintaining their Catholic identity.

These reflective, justice and social aspects of the Jocist movements often connected with existing Church ministries and missions such as the St Vincent de Paul Society or programs run by religious institutes.

1980s – The Emergence of the New Movements

The 1980s saw the rise of a number of new movements and ecclesial communities. Of particular significance was the Antioch movement. Antioch invited young people into a positive Christian community experience which encouraged participation in parish life. Led by young people and supported by parent couples, Antioch called upon young people to speak about their faith in a peer-to-peer ministry model³. Antioch grew very quickly through a combination of weekends and local youth group experiences.

Antioch called upon young people to speak about their faith in a peer-to-peer ministry

This decade also saw the emergence of new types of school retreat ministries, either through teams of young people and leaders traveling to schools, or experienced retreat programs

being integrated into school life.

In 1984 St Pope John Paul II gathered young people from around the world in Rome and entrusted them with a large wooden cross. In 1985 he met with them again as part of the International Year for Youth. These gatherings were the inspiration for World Youth Day, and the large wooden cross is now known as the WYD Cross.

1990s – The Decade of Diocesan and Parish Youth Ministry

The 1990s saw parishes and dioceses develop a more inclusive response to young people fostered by the introduction of the *comprehensive model of youth ministry*⁴ into Australia. This approach called for diverse approaches in order to engage a greater range of young people. Parishes worked to incorporate young people into all facets of parish life by inviting young people into parish leadership roles, seeking to become inclusive of youth in liturgies and celebrations; they connected young people with existing parish ministries and missions, while providing young people with a place for peer ministry and support.

During this period, diocesan coordinators often became trainers as well as facilitators of youth ministry in order to develop tailored responses to the needs of particular parishes in relation to young people.

Building upon the *comprehensive approach*, diocesan youth offices often supplemented these initiatives with a range of larger gatherings including rallies, camps and retreats.

In 1995 the Australian Bishops launched the *Young People and the Future*⁵ project. This project called upon all dioceses and organisations working with young people to facilitate listening processes. These processes quantified existing church initiatives and identified areas of concern in the life of young people. The final report in 1998 observed that the Church must be present to young people's problems, such as drugs and alcohol, employment and wages, housing and living conditions, as well as being present to their experience and identity within the Church⁶.

The 1990s introduced the comprehensive model of youth ministry.

2000s – The decade of World Youth Days

During the first decade of the new millennium, young Australians and their bishops increasingly began attending the World Youth Days (WYD). In 2000, the Australian bishops made a concerted effort to take a pilgrimage of young people to WYD in Rome as part of the Jubilee year celebrations. Through these experiences, the Church in Australia got a taste of John Paul II's hopes and vision for young people.

It was a catalyst for both young people and bishops, which culminated in Australia's hosting WYD in 2008 in Sydney.

Hosting the Sydney WYD in 2008 was the most significant event in the history of Australian youth ministry. For some participants, the local engagement of youth and the revitalisation of Church life that occurred through the pilgrimage of the WYD Cross and Icon over the twelve months leading up to the event in July 2008 provided more lasting results than the WYD week itself. However, with over 110,000 Australian pilgrims in Sydney for the WYD week, the imagery and engagement with the wider community and secular media was an intense and powerful witness to the entire country.

Sydney's WYD in 2008 – the most significant event in Australian youth ministry

This decade saw youth ministry dramatically diversify. Many schools established specific campus or school youth ministry roles, youth ministry programs or immersion programs. University

chaplains also developed a greater Catholic identity in their ministry with young adults. At the same time many dioceses and religious institutes revitalised their strategies for vocations.

This extensive expansion of ministry with young people was also fuelled by John Paul II's call for a 'New Evangelisation'. John Paul II and Benedict XVI spoke often about the need for a new evangelisation or "*re-evangelisation in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel*".⁷

[Current Landscape]

The above overview of the recent past shows how much the current landscape of youth ministry in Australia stands upon the shoulders of the ministries and models developed in prior decades⁸. Youth ministry has never been so comprehensive and well supported as it is today, obviously shaped by WYD 2008. At the same time, there are problems that inhibit the Church's capacities to evangelise and catechise young people.

Local parishes continue to welcome and include young people through a variety of methods and programs, though many struggle with a scarcity of resources. Many schools have dedicated roles or programs to evangelise youth and foster them into ministries within and beyond the school community, but their involvement is usually short term. Religious institutes offer specific programs shaped by their charism through their communities and schools, but their community bases are often too limited to sustain the transient youth population. Ecclesial communities and movements also operate across multiple parishes and dioceses as they engage in targeted youth evangelisation via youth teams and events, but are often disconnected from parish life.

Australian youth ministry is now diverse in method, theology and spirituality.

Diocesan youth ministry offices are challenged to balance many and varied work requirements including:

- direct ministry to young people through formation programs and large events
- indirect ministry that forms and trains leaders in parishes
- collaboration with other diocesan agencies and youth ministry organisations
- participation in wider ecclesial events such as World Youth Days.

The current landscape of youth ministry is diverse in method, theology and spirituality. Youth Ministry has been supported with:

- a greater diversity of training and formation experiences for young people
- a larger allocation of resources from the Church
- greater Catholic involvement in school youth ministry, university chaplaincy and vocation ministries.

Building upon these current experiences and expressions of youth ministry the Australian Bishops have invested in important resources to solidify and sustain this growth, confirming its place and priority in the Church.

Anointed and Sent: An Australian Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry

During the 2000s, the Australian Network of Diocesan Youth Ministry Coordinators began developing a national vision statement for ministry

with young people in Australia. When WYD08 was announced the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) took up this project and formed a working group to develop and finalise the document. In July 2009 the Australian bishops released *Anointed and Sent: an Australian Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry*⁹.

Anointed and Sent outlines three goals and eight focus areas for ministry with young people in Australia. The three goals are:

1. to foster the personal and spiritual development of young people;
2. to draw young people into responsible participation in the life, mission and work of the Catholic faith community; and
3. to empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today.¹⁰

The goals are pursued through eight focus areas for ministry with young people:

1. Prayer and Worship;
2. Evangelisation,
3. Catechesis,
4. Pastoral Care,
5. Community Life,
6. Justice and Service,
7. Leadership Development,
8. Advocacy¹¹.

***Anointed and Sent* is the benchmark for discussion about youth ministry in Australia.**

*“All eight focus areas highlight indispensable dimensions of ministry with young people”.*¹²

Since its launch in 2009, over 5000 copies of *Anointed and Sent* have been distributed around Australia. It is the benchmark for discussion and dialogue about youth ministry in Australia. It provides a language and context for ministry with young people.

The comprehensive approach outlined in this vision statement “is designed to affirm existing models of youth ministry; provide direction and encourage local creativity”.¹³

The Church as a whole is asked to respond to *Anointed and Sent*, in its implementation and its ongoing development. Youth ministers are encouraged to engage in dialogue upon each of the goals and focus areas, both individually and in an integrated approach. They are called

to reflect upon the vision’s application in an Australian context and to develop new resources, training and study to carry Australian youth ministry forward.

Australian Catholic Youth Council

This ongoing dialogue is, in part, facilitated through a new national body, the Australian Catholic Youth Council (ACYC). The Australian Bishops established the ACYC as an advisory body to the Australian Bishops’ Commission for Pastoral Life (BCPL) in the lead-up to WYD08. The ACYC seeks to listen and respond to the voices of young Australian Catholics and advises the bishops on matters concerning ministry with young people¹⁴.

The first task given to the ACYC in 2007 was to identify what was needed to carry the momentum of WYD 2008 forward. The ACYC responded by hosting the national Youth Leaders Gathering in November 2008 where it sought feedback and advice from over 350 youth ministers from around the country. The outcomes of this gathering were published in *Moving Forward with Jesus*¹⁵, a document that outlined important strategies in the areas of national events, formation for young people and support for youth ministry.

A principal challenge for the ACYC is to reflect upon the national needs of youth ministry in Australia, while still being attentive to the needs of local faith communities. In attempting to address these macro and micro issues the ACYC has advocated the development of a number of key national youth ministry initiatives. These are important initiatives for the development of Australian Catholic Youth Ministry into the future.

The *Australian Catholic Youth Ministry Convention (ACYMC)* provides vital formation for youth ministers and unique networking opportunities¹⁶. Held biennially since 2010, the ACYMC is Australia’s largest gathering of Catholic youth ministers from schools, parishes, dioceses, movements, religious institutes, communities and other organisations and ministries. The convention supports our youth ministers and celebrates their contribution while providing opportunities for reflection on theory and practice in the Australian context.

The *Australian WYD Project* provides national oversight and support for Australia’s participation in the international World Youth Days¹⁷. The project is advised by an Australian WYD Committee and facilitated

by a partnership between the ACBC and an appointed travel provider. The project generates finances, which enables the employment of a part time worker to manage this complex and important initiative. The WYD project has developed resources over the course of several WYDs. These resources, together with information about host cities and their preparations, are provided to pilgrimage coordinators to ease their workload. The project also enables consolidated information from all of the Australian pilgrims to be communicated to the WYD organisers in the host city. Finally, the project helps to develop a sense of the national identity through the national gathering and merchandise at WYD.

The Australian Catholic Youth Festival was developed as a means to help the ACYC to fulfil its mandate to listen and respond to the needs of young Australian Catholics. The festival exists to provide young people with opportunities to deepen their relationship with Jesus, be empowered to be disciples in the world today, and to encounter and celebrate the vitality of the Church in Australia¹⁸.

The festival will also provide an ongoing forum for bishops to experience face-to-face encounters with the realities of young Catholics and collect longitudinal data through listening forums and research projects. The inaugural festival was held in Melbourne 2013 and gathered over 3400 people, making it the largest national gathering of young Catholics in Australia.

Australia's participation in future World Youth Days, the Youth Ministry Convention and the Youth Festival will assist to develop youth ministry into the future by:

- raising the profile of youth ministers in the broader Church;
- producing resources and experiences;
- providing formation and faith experiences for young people and youth ministers.

From 2014 these events will take place on a three-year cycle.

A final initiative of the ACYC has been the establishment of a Youth & Youth Ministry Research Task Group, which advocates and reflects upon research into youth and youth ministry in Australia. This task group will respond to existing research opportunities like the National Church Life Survey, facilitate new opportunities for research amidst national events like the ACYF and WYD, and identify gaps and opportunities for broader research projects.

ACBC Office for Youth

In November 2008 the ACBC agreed to employ a national youth ministry projects officer for a period of three years (2009–2011). The projects officer was mandated to implement the outcomes of the Youth Leaders Gathering and provide specialised support to the Australian Catholic Youth Council as it sought to build upon the successes of WYD in Sydney. In 2011, the position became a full-time role within the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life. In 2014 the ACBC established an Office for Youth, and a Director and Projects Manager were appointed to ongoing roles.

The establishment of the ACBC Office for Youth emphasises the importance the Australian Bishops place upon ministry with young people. The key task for the ACBC Office for Youth is to continue to promote and form the Church in Australia in the vision provided by *Anointed and Sent*. The Office supports the ACYC in its role to identify and advocate for areas of development in Australian youth ministry. The Office also collaborates with other Church agencies to enhance and sustain youth ministry in Australia.

The growth in youth ministry across the country since WYD 2008 has been so significant that in recent years many bishops and religious leaders have commissioned reviews of youth ministry. These reviews have reflected upon efficiencies and outcomes, and how existing ministries are collaborating. Reviews discuss which initiatives can be supported given the diverse needs, contexts, and limited financial resources available. Youth ministry is now pushing the boundaries, assumptions and resources of the Church in Australia.

Youth ministry continues to experience a high turnover of leaders, even as they require greater formation, pastoral care, and management. There are minimal Australian resources for youth ministry such as formation programs, music, and theological reflection. Although youth ministers are often early adopters of new technologies, keeping up with the latest technologies and social media presents continued challenges. We need to find sustainable solutions for these issues as we move into the future.

Youth ministry is now pushing the boundaries

[Internal Influences on Youth Ministry]

At this point, it will be helpful to widen the lens through which we are exploring the landscape of youth ministry. Influences arise both from within the Church and also externally in the broader Australian culture. They are both problems and opportunities for the Church as well.

Parish: “not an out-dated institution”

Many ask if the parish is still relevant to the future

The Australian parish has many problems in relation to young people. Declining Mass attendance and an aging community mean that parishes often struggle to maintain their

existence while seeking to evangelise. This reality has caused many to ask if the parish is still relevant to the future of the Church.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis asserts that parish is “not an out-dated institution”¹⁹ as it is called to be “the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration.”²⁰ He calls parishes to be “in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few”. Parishes must be mission orientated, and “not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion”.²¹

Pope Francis also reminds us that other Church institutions such as communities, movements, and forms of association are a source of enrichment bringing a new evangelising fervour, but reminds them not to lose contact with the rich reality of the local parish.²² The evangelisation of young people ought to be at the heart of any efforts to renew parish life in this country.

Inter-relationship between school and parish

The relationship between parish and school needs much more reflection and development. Schools and parishes possess different strengths and weaknesses in their efforts to evangelise young people.

Schools often possess greater geographical boundaries than a parish, and may be constricted by funding arrangements and administration. On the other hand, parishes are often under-resourced and ill-equipped to engage youth. In reality young people’s faith development requires a contribution from schools, parishes, and families .

Leadership Transitions

Youth ministry is subject to a continual transition of leaders. This is because most youth ministers are either young adults or committed parents, who usually pass through the ministry within 2–4 years. Young adults look for new opportunities beyond youth ministry and parents often cease to be involved as their own children move beyond the youth ministry. This leadership transition can be a creative opportunity for growth but it can also undermine the accumulated experience and wisdom required by youth ministry. This transition requires on-going training, mentoring and formation (especially in the area of professional standards) to nurture the professional and spiritual wellbeing of youth ministry leaders. If successful, it will in turn equip the Church with strong leadership into the future.

Ethnic Diversity

Australia’s growing ethnic diversity is reflected in the life of the Church. Many ethnic groups celebrate their culture through their religious practice. Some groups bring programs, movements or ecclesial communities from their country of origin. These groups often possess a rich vitality in their expressions of faith and culture. Their strong sense of religious and cultural identity is sometimes thought to protect young people from the secularising tendencies of Australian society. However, this strong sense of cultural identity can also inhibit broader Church engagement and collaboration.

Universal Church

The Universal Church continues to be a vital influence upon local Church life, but its focus can shift through a change of papacy. Young people experience this most directly through WYDs. The WYD

messages communicate the Holy Father's hopes for young people and are often used by youth ministers in their discussions and formation.

An international dialogue about youth ministry is also taking place. A common language for Catholic youth ministry is developing through the influence of documents like *Renewing the Vision*²³ from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. This document was the first to outline the three goals and eight focus areas of the comprehensive approach as a vision for youth ministry. This vision has been an inspiration for similar statements from the Bishops Conferences of New Zealand (*Tū Kahikatea Standing Tall*)²⁴, Ireland (*Called Together, Making the Difference*)²⁵, England and Wales (*Called to a Noble Adventure*)²⁶, and Australia (*Anointed and Sent*)²⁷.

A common language is developing.

The impact and networks of ecclesial communities also contributes to the international dialogue regarding youth ministry. In some countries where parish life is struggling, new ecclesial communities have flourished, while in other countries they have had less influence as parish and diocesan structures provide a strong mission focus. Ecclesial communities are often strongly influenced by their founding culture and are sustained through strong networks. Their distinctive approaches to youth ministry offer opportunities for other ministries to learn from their initiatives. At the same time, their distinctive contributions are not always easily replicable in the Australian context.

These internal influences assist and challenge the youth ministry community to work collaboratively and to celebrate its diversity. The Australian youth ministry community is called in a special way to establish new approaches into the future.

[External Influences on Youth Ministry]

The Church exists within a world in which young people are more and more isolated physically and emotionally. In addition the world is becoming more secular and is currently analysing the Church's past sins in its dealings with young people. The family unit is changing and our population is consolidating in some areas and dispersing in others. These factors call the Church to be present beyond its walls and to be missionary in its focus.

Royal Commission and Child Protection.

The Church is currently immersed in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, together with the child protection legislation in each state. The Royal Commission is a critical process for the Church, and indeed the whole country. The Church has established the Truth Justice and Healing Council to coordinate "the response to the Royal Commission with full disclosure and a commitment to justice for victims and survivors".²⁸

The Royal Commission has been preceded by the creation of child protection legislation in most Australian states over the past decade.

These different legislations enact approval processes for those who work with vulnerable people and identify standards for both risk assessment and the management of programs that include young people. Dioceses and religious institutes now have professional standards and support structures in place to assist communities to meet legislative requirements. Resources such as *Integrity in Ministry* and *Integrity in the Service of the Church* provide frameworks for communities to work through and meet required standards²⁹. The Church must adhere to these standards and even go beyond the basic requirements to protect all people, especially young people, from future betrayals.

The church must protect all people, especially the young, from future betrayals.

A Secular Society

The Church's credibility is further challenged by an increasingly secular Australian society, as the nation continues to isolate its governance from religious expression and privatise belief. This creates significant difficulties for a Church committed to justice and the dignity of all, as governing bodies are increasingly driven by big business, economics and fear.

In addition to this, the Church is frequently portrayed as impeding progress or as irrelevant by elements of the secular society. It is more important than ever that the Church actually stands as a credible voice of reason in this context. One of the most critical tasks of youth ministers is to explain the Church's teaching and to deepen young people's understanding of faith and its position in matters that affect our culture.

Population Distribution

The Church's relevance manifests itself differently in urban and rural settings. Each requires specific approaches to engage young people and to support local communities.

Two thirds of Australians live in a capital city³⁰. Secularism pervades the urban experience. The Church competes for young people's attention with the entertainment industry, their demanding work schedules and busy social lives. Greater diversity in ministry, resource allocation and collaboration is required in urban settings to minister to a growing population.

The viability of the mission of the Church in regional and rural areas is greatly affected by a diminishing population and scarcer access to resources. The Church faces a similar decline in mass attendance and resources in rural locations and so is limited in its ability to support and respond to young people. Youth ministry is particularly affected by the transience of young people in these areas as they move away for education and employment.

The need for greater collaboration between rural and urban dioceses is reflected in the need for the youth ministry community to share resources and experiences.

Increasing Mental Health Issues

The teenage years are now not only a period of intense development and change, but are increasingly a time in which young people experience particular challenges arising from mental health issues. In fact, "mental ill health is the number one issue facing young Australians. Mental disorders are more prevalent for young people aged 16-24 than any other age group, and affect 26 per cent of young Australians in any year".³¹ The Church needs to be especially present to young people as they experience such challenges. Many youth ministers already encounter and respond to the mental health issues of young people. Youth ministry experiences like WYD pilgrimages, youth weekends or rallies now normally provide a first aid officer and a mental health officer to care for young people. Additional resources and training are being offered in some locations to support leaders in identifying, assisting and referring young people when such issues arise.

Families

The composition of the family unit is more diverse than ever before. The separation of parents, the experience of living between two homes, blended families, financial burdens, and bullying are just some of the issues young people may encounter in their family. Pope Francis has called his first Synod to focus on the family to discuss how the Church responds to 'The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelisation'. It is hoped that the synod will build upon the understanding that family is imperative for effective youth evangelisation.

The Church's ministry with young people has to be responsive to the needs of families. In particular it must respond pastorally to the needs of young people and their families.

Schools are frequently at the coalface in providing family support as they encounter struggling and broken families through their students. There are many family support strategies currently used by schools in our Catholic education system.

Catholic youth ministry must respond to families' needs

[Future Considerations]

Over recent decades youth ministry has consolidated its place as a vital part of the Church's ministry in Australia. It is now increasingly important that youth ministry engage in greater collaboration and communion within the whole Church, and especially must mature in its theological and ecclesial foundations. Youth ministry must also establish creative ways of moving to the "geographical and existential peripheries of our world".³²

As we look to the future, a number of scenarios invite immediate consideration. Can the Australian Catholic Youth Festival reach 10,000 participants? Can it be a sustainable feature of Australian youth ministry? Can we take 5000 pilgrims to an international WYD? Could the average term of a youth minister be lengthened, bringing much-needed depth and expertise to the youth ministry community? Can Australian youth ministry develop a library of resources for both theological reflection and practical application? What will be the outcome of the Royal Commission and how will it affect youth ministry? Can the Church re-establish itself as a credible voice in our secular world?

It is important not only to ask these questions, but to explore ways in which we can answer them creatively. The experience of youth ministry today strongly influences the Church of the future. What then, are critical steps that we can take at this point in time?

Leadership

The transient nature of youth ministry leadership needs to be addressed. The solution will be twofold: to find short-term training options that recognise that the tenure of many leaders will be short, while at the same time being flexible enough to develop educational and ministerial pathways for some youth ministers to serve the Church for longer periods of time.

Training for youth ministers – essential

The Church must freely provide training that addresses a range of competencies and skills for ministry. The Church needs to develop this training through online programs, videos and resources using new technologies. These resources can also provide assistance for rural and poor communities.

The need to support and encourage youth ministers is essential. Opportunities like the ACYMC and the ACYF provide networking, peer support and pastoral care for youth ministers. These opportunities also provide valuable experiences of varied interaction between different youth ministries and contexts. As those working in parishes, schools, ecclesial communities, religious institutes and universities interact, they will learn from each other. Senior youth ministry leaders holding diocesan and national roles will need a diverse range of experiences to sustain a holistic vision for a diversified youth ministry.

Finally, youth ministry is one of several lay ecclesial ministries that require greater education and accreditation. To this end, the Australian Bishops Commission for Church Ministry established the Catholic Council for Lay Pastoral Ministry in 2011. The council is mandated to support, assist and promote the education and accreditation of lay pastoral ministers in the Church in Australia³³. An ongoing dialogue with this council about the role of youth ministers will be required as part of the development of all lay leadership in the Church.

Comprehensive Reflection and Response

Australian youth ministry will be enriched by greater theological and empirical research. In particular, this needs to take place through the production of new and specifically Australian research and the development of our own resources and programs.

Significant studies like *The Spirituality of Generation Y*³⁴ are critically important but also time-consuming and expensive. The Church can however carry out and compile a variety of smaller studies. Collectively these research projects can continue to inform the Church to respond better to Australian youth.

Communion & Stewardship

A deeper understanding of communion and stewardship will enhance Australian youth ministry. Archbishop John Bathersby writes that through a spirituality of communion "we are challenged to imagine our inter-relationships in terms of mutual indwelling modelled on the union existing between the Father, the Son and the Spirit. In such a life, each nourishes and sustains the being of the other".³⁵ By appropriating

this spirituality of communion different youth ministries will be better able to benefit each other.

The spirituality of communion also calls youth ministers to become *stewards* of the faith, Church, their ministry and the young people they serve. As stewards we are called to “*receive God’s gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, and return them with increase to the Lord*”.³⁶ The call to stewardship requires youth ministers to develop ownership and responsibility for ministry.

Prioritising Evangelisation

It is important to understand the three goals and eight focus areas of youth ministry contained in *Anointed and Sent*. However, the overall purpose of the vision statement is to evangelise young people and develop disciples. Any step toward discipleship requires a first evangelisation, a personal encounter with the risen Christ.

Concentrating on evangelisation does not exalt one focus area of *Anointed and Sent* above the others. Prioritising evangelisation actually seeks to animate the vision for youth ministry in its entirety by enacting the statement’s three goals to nurture the spiritual life of young people, help them engage in community and empower them for mission.

Perhaps the greatest asset for evangelisation of young Australians are those youths who attended WYD 2008 and who are now maturing disciples. Can they respond to the invitation of Pope Francis to live “an authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it.”³⁷ This generation must be empowered to evangelise their peers and carry the Church’s mission forward.

[Conclusion]

The Church’s ongoing ministry with young people must build upon the learnings and experiences of those who have come before us, even as we also reflect upon factors internal and external to the Church. It is critical that the high levels of support for youth ministry continue into the future from the Australian Bishops, as well as priests, religious and laity.

The landscape will continue to change. For example, a revised edition of *Anointed and Sent* has already been prepared, only five years after the initial document was published. What will that change look like in the future? The Church must act in partnership with the Holy Spirit. Only through a partnership with the Holy Spirit can the Church in Australia meet the challenges of sustainable leadership and develop creative strategies to evangelise young people. If in the pursuit of these goals we were able to embrace a spirituality of communion, could we dare to hope that we could arrest the decline of young people’s attendance at mass? Perhaps the next decade would be remembered as the time when the rate of young people’s participation in the Church actually increased.