

## **FOCUS COMMISSION ON YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS**

### **WHITE PAPER**

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour” (Lk 2).

“Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4).

From *Evangelii Gaudium*:

105. Youth ministry, as traditionally organized, has also suffered the impact of social changes. Young people often fail to find responses to their concerns, needs, problems and hurts in the usual structures. As adults, we find it hard to listen patiently to them, to appreciate their concerns and demands, and to speak to them in a language they can understand. For the same reason, our efforts in the field of education do not produce the results expected. The rise and growth of associations and movements mostly made up of young people can be seen as the work of the Holy Spirit, who blazes new trails to meet their expectations and their search for a deep spirituality and a more real scene of belonging. There remains a need, however, to ensure that these associations actively participate in the Church’s overall pastoral efforts.

106. Even if it is not always easy to approach young people, progress has been made in two areas: the awareness that the entire community is called to evangelize and educate the young, and the urgent need for the young to exercise greater leadership. We should recognize that despite the present crisis of commitment and communal relationships, many young people are making common cause before the problems of our world and are taking up various forms of activism and volunteer work. Some take part in the life of the Church as members of service groups and various missionary initiatives in their own dioceses and in other places. How beautiful it is to see that young people are “street preachers” (*callejeros de la fe*), joyfully bringing Jesus to every street, every town square and every corner of the earth!

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Focus Commission on Youth and Young Adults states categorically that this area is critical for the life of the Church in Canada and in Winnipeg. Unless we can find ways to maintain and develop the relationship with young people beyond the age of Confirmation, there is no future for the Church.

Youth and Young Adult Ministry cannot be understood as an adjunct to the mission of the Archdiocese. It is integral to that mission and needs to be blended into all that the Archdiocese does in the service of its people.

## **PRIORITIES**

- Relevance: make the connection between the faith of the Church and the culture and concerns of the youth.
- Developmental evangelization: promote a progressively deeper understanding and appreciation of the faith of the Church appropriate to the age of the youth, including sacramental preparation for “adult” sacraments (marriage, baptism of their child, etc.).
- Youth involvement in the Archdiocese: promote active, responsible participation in the day-to-day life of the Church.
- Relationship building:
  - help youth grow in their relationship with God through an active life of prayer,
  - help youth grow in a realization that the Church belongs to them and that they belong to the Church
  - go beyond the Catholic institutions to reach the youth who are not engaged, or who are disillusioned,
  - welcome youth back into the Church, encouraging them to find their own level of engagement.

## **STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS**

These five priorities contain within them a wide range of potential strategies. Our conversations have identified a few that we consider the most urgent within the next three to five years.

1. **EDUCATION** - The education in the faith of our youth requires three elements that must be interwoven:
  - a. Catechesis - on-going instruction in what the Church believes, that progresses in depth and breadth as the youth grow older, and addresses their developmental needs.
  - b. Evangelization - again a progressively deeper and fuller immersion in the reality of the Gospel as it enters their life at the various stages through which they are growing.
  - c. Spirituality - a serious, developmental process of teaching young people to pray in a way that allows them to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that can inform their choices, decisions, and actions.

**PROPOSAL**: Formulate a meaningful developmental program of formation that grows out of the Confirmation Preparation and continues through adolescence, into early adulthood, and onward to the age of at least 35. In other words, ensure that the formation of youth does not end with Confirmation.

2. **FAITH AND JUSTICE** - In order for their experience of faith to have practical application and not remain only a set of tenets, there is a need for moments when young people can come together in service of others. For the experience to be genuinely formative, though, it must include an element of reflection and prayer, such that social justice and faith mutually inform each other. Otherwise it is merely humanitarianism; “Do not even the Gentiles do this?”

**PROPOSAL:** Promote the development in the parishes of opportunities for service, allowing youth from different places to experience a communal response to the needs of others within the context of the Church. These cannot be done on a large scale (hundreds of people), but rather in smaller groupings of 15 - 20. The kind of service given is not as important as the engagement of the youth in the service and the follow-up reflection and prayer.

3. **YOUTH INVOLVEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH** - For young people to see that they have a future in the Church, they need to have a present. There have to be legitimate and worthwhile opportunities for young people to be involved with adults in the ordinary life of the Church. Positions on parish councils, liturgy teams, ministry planning processes, outreach teams, etc., should be offered to young people as an ordinary way that the Church functions, thus creating a sense of ownership and belonging.

**PROPOSAL:** Encourage the development of opportunities for young people, including teenagers, to participate actively in the leadership of the Church along with mentoring adults who can help them integrate the experience and their faith. Formation in liturgical ministries should be an ordinary part of the formation of young Catholics, with appropriate opportunities for them to exercise these ministries in their parishes, and not just at the Children’s Mass.

4. **FORMATION OF YOUTH MINISTERS** - Across the Archdiocese attention must be given to the formation of clergy and laity in the dynamics of youth ministry. In particular, priests need help to overcome any discomfort they may have in relating to youth so that they can confidently interact outside of their parish church with the young people in their area. Quality “priest-time” and/or “sister-time” is important for young people if they are to feel at home in their local parish.

**PROPOSAL:** a) Develop a program of on-going formation for adults, clergy and laity, to equip them for more effective engagement with youth and young adults in the three dynamics mentioned above; i.e., catechesis, evangelization, spirituality. b) Provide resources on the Archdiocesan website that can be used in parish programs. c) Consider creating teams of people who can visit parishes across the Archdiocese to provide support, training, mentoring, and leadership for those who are engaged in youth work.

5. FIND THEM WHERE THEY ARE - Many youth do not presently see the Church as a place they want to be. The Church needs to go out to meet them on their own turf. The use of social media, being present in their usual haunts (“mall ministry”), and engaging them on their own terms will build relationships that may lead to a renewed sense of interest in their faith among the youth.

PROPOSAL: Create a practical, realistic outreach to young people beyond the walls of the Church and the Catholic schools. Invite dialogue, exploration, interaction in their vernacular. This requires mentors who understand youth culture and can speak their language. Provide a forum for youth opinion and interchange in Archdiocesan media; e.g., a youth page in *The New Winepress*, a discussion forum on the Archdiocesan website, etc.