

YOUTH MINISTRY
IN THE
DIOCESE OF LANCASTER



A CONSULTATION
BY:

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Youth Ministry in the Diocese of Lancaster

1. Introduction

Dear Friends,

For some time now it has become clear to me that we need to evaluate our aims and strategy in ministry to the young people of the Diocese. There is a big question to answer – *‘How best to resource and encourage young people to grow in their Christian faith, seeing themselves as an essential part of the family of the Church?’*

This document is a call for a renewed and co-ordinated response throughout the Diocese to the urgent challenges of youth ministry today. In all our efforts, structures and initiatives, a common vision will be necessary if it is to impact on the Young and call them into the discipleship of the Lord.

In my own reflections, and listening carefully to those who work with young people in the Diocese – especially those who work at parish/school level, Castlerigg and Diocesan level, I do not underestimate the commitment and dedication of parents, families, parishes, schools/colleges, outreach worker initiatives, Castlerigg Manor and Brettargh Holt. I am immensely grateful for all you do in the name of Christ and His Church and accept that this work can be difficult in the increasingly secularised society in which we find ourselves.

The challenges of society today are very different from what they were thirty, twenty or even ten years ago. The Church, too, is a very different place. Priests and parishioners feel the absence of young people, and the joy and life they bring to our parishes; we are weakened without their presence and contribution. I am very much aware, too, that the Church has been a pioneer in education and community development work on offer to many in our part of the country, particularly in our investment in the work and mission of local parishes, schools and places such as Castlerigg.

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2. Aims of Youth Ministry in the Diocese of Lancaster

I would like to present these aims for careful consideration by the *Youth Service Management Group* and for those directly involved in ministry to young people in the diocese:

AIM 1: To help the young people of our schools, colleges and parishes grow in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as his disciples in the Church.

Youth Ministry ... it's about encouraging discipleship

The first aim of youth ministry is to encourage our young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world of today. Young people are searching for adventure, a compelling and challenging vision of life, and a cause worthy of their energy and commitment. They hunger to hear the Good News that finds a response in discipleship. As their companions on this journey, we must to fulfill the first goal of youth ministry by ...

- Proclaiming the Good News of Jesus through witness and word to young people.
- Enabling young people to live as disciples through their involvement in service, ministry, and leadership.
- Providing young people with the faith skills necessary for discipleship.

AIM 2: To enable the full participation of young people in the life and mission of the local Church.

Youth Ministry ... it's about developing a sense of belonging

The second aim of our ministry with young people is to draw them into responsible participation and contribution to the life and mission of the Catholic Church, especially, but not exclusively, of their local parish. Young people have a hunger for relationship, and *belonging* to a community. Family,

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Peers, School, voluntary organizations, and Parish are primary connections for young people. The Church will need to fulfill this second aim by ...

- Being a ‘youth friendly’ community in our chaplaincy/parish that welcomes young people, values their participation, and calls forth their gifts, especially life and joy.
- Integrating young people into the liturgical, pastoral, and ministerial life of their local parish.
- Creating opportunities for young people to enter into healthy relationships of trust and respect with their peers and with adults.
- Promoting Catholic identity and religious literacy through catechetical opportunities especially for young people.
- Encouraging young people themselves to reach out to their peers at school/college, work and in their local parish.

AIM 3: To encourage and nurture the growth of the whole person, with prayer and spirituality as the basis for all human development.

Youth Ministry ... it’s about drawing out gifts, encouraging personal growth and leading young people into a new understanding of themselves and others.

The third aim of youth ministry in the Diocese would be to nurture the personal and spiritual growth of each young person. Adolescence is an important time for mental, spiritual, social, and physical growth. Their experiences and relationships greatly influence their healthy and positive development. The Church strives to surround young people with the best possible external scaffolds—networks of caring relationships of family, school, peers, and other adults—while young people are developing their internal psychological and spiritual backbone—their values, life skills, commitments, and conscience. We will endeavour to fulfill this third aim of youth ministry by ...

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- Enabling young people to develop an intimate relationship with Jesus in prayer.
- Actively supporting positive youth development – personal, social, team-building, character, communication skills and fostering healthy values and life skills.
- Supporting families/carers in their care of young people.
- Providing opportunities in their parishes, deaneries and in the Diocese as a whole to grow as human beings, and to express compassion, service, commitment to faith and justice (Young people have enormous gifts to offer in these areas).

3. The Spiritual Foundation of Youth Ministry.

Today, there is a great thirst for spirituality in our society, but we must not be deluded. Many of our young people are consumers of various 'new-age' products and ideas, which are supposedly free of the rigidity of organised religious belief. This may not be an absolute obstacle to our ministry, but rather an opportunity, encouraging us to discern what is good and can be assimilated, and equally alerting us to what is evil and damaging.

Genuine interest in spirituality requires an authentic Catholic *and* imaginative response from all concerned, especially as many young people lack the necessary language of faith *and* experience of community experienced hopefully at Sunday Mass in their parish Church. It is in this regard that we are called to bring our young people to know and love Jesus as the Son of God, as we introduce them to experiences of prayer, spirituality and basic Christian teaching. We need to recognise the masculine *and* feminine dimensions of the Catholic tradition of prayer and allow our young people to access these and make them their own.

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4. Practical implications.

- Those ministering to young people should recognise that we are often viewed as guides and examples in the spiritual life. We may be, in fact, the closest that young people have to a spiritual director/guide. This requires *awareness, sensitivity and responsibility* and, of course, a radical life of faith and prayer and concern on our own part.
- A spiritual awareness in young people does not grow in a vacuum. It requires a patient education and catechesis, one that helps to ground them in the great Tradition of the Church. Catechesis should have a firm foundation in the Scriptures and the teaching of the Church, whilst always seeking connections with their experience of life so that young people can internalise and gradually understand what this living Tradition is offering them. This also helps to show that the Christian life is a vibrant and exciting adventure, not an oppressive, boring and monochrome hindrance to having fun.
- *Personal Prayer, Sacred Scripture, and The Sacred Liturgy of the Church*, are the great fonts of spiritual nourishment and especially treasured resources in our apostolate to young people. All of us involved in leading youth ministry have a great responsibility to form young people and prepare them for worship within the parish community. I know the *Diocesan Music Scholarship Scheme* has been extremely helpful here and I should like this to develop further. Youth ministry around the Diocese as a whole should always involve *celebrating* and *deepening* young people's relationship with Jesus Christ through the bestowal of grace, communal prayer and liturgical experiences; it will *awaken* their awareness of the Holy Spirit at work in their lives and *incorporate* young people more fully into the sacramental life of the Church, especially participation in the Eucharist. It will *nurture* the personal prayer life of young people; and it will *foster* family rituals of prayer.

I am convinced as was Pope John Paul II (at *World Youth Day - Denver*) that:

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“[Young people] want to have an active role in the Church, and to be sent out in the name of Christ to evangelize and transform the

world around them. Young people are ready to commit themselves to the Gospel message if it is presented in all its nobility and liberating force.

They will continue to take an active part in the liturgy if they experience it as capable of leading them to a deep personal relationship with God; and it is from this experience that there will come priestly and religious vocations marked by true evangelical and missionary energy”.

- Youth ministry is more than organizing special (sporting, religious and social) events, even though these do have a valuable role. Indeed it would be a good idea to have a diocesan youth convention every couple of years, and more special youth retreats at Castlerigg. It is however much more about *the response of the whole Christian community (especially in the parish and deanery) to the many and varied needs of young people, and the sharing of the unique gifts of youth with the Local Church.* To be most effective, this is a ministry **to, with, by,** and **for** young people that involves and is ordinarily based in their families, parish, schools and colleges. At the very heart of this ministry is the presence of caring, supportive, faith-filled relationships where young people experience the Good News of Jesus in the flesh and grow in his grace.

5. *Observations...*

- All Diocesan Youth Ministry initiatives need to be supported by a firm basis in prayer. For this reason an effort must be made throughout the Diocese to encourage prayer for youth ministry initiatives and for young people in general.
- Even as I set out our *Aims of Youth Ministry* in the Diocese, I acknowledge that there can be no ‘one size fits all’ approach of working with young people. For this reason there will always need to be a certain amount of flexibility and creativity at local and Diocesan level as

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we seek to meet the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral needs of young people.

- New ideas and methods should be examined and welcomed within the above *Aims of Youth Ministry (3)*. We must not be afraid to build on what is unanimously positive, discard what is not working, and to move into new or relatively untried areas, with vision, faith and courage. We need to remember that much of our energies have in the past been directed at the many young people who have not been active at Mass. This is and will always be an important part of our mission, however we must not neglect efforts at feeding and nurturing faith commitment amongst those youngsters who are keen to grow in their discipleship as practising Catholics. Indeed I should like to intensify our efforts here.

- Our youth ministry – whatever form that may take – prayer, concerts, sports, pilgrimages, walks, cinema - should be a powerful medium of evangelisation – indeed encouraging the young themselves to be evangelisers *and* disciples of the Lord. As Paul VI said young people “*should become the first apostles of the young, in direct contact with them exercising the apostolate for themselves among themselves*” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 12). For Youth Ministry to be missionary and outward-looking, it needs to contain the positive elements of: *love, witness, outreach, proclamation, invitation, conversion, and discipleship*.

- The local parish is where the Church is found for most people ordinarily. The Parish is where the Gospel is opened and proclaimed, where believers are formed and sent to renew the earth. Parishes are the home of the Christian community and the place where God's people meet Jesus our Lord in Word and Sacrament and come in touch with ‘the source and summit’ of the Church's life. Sadly, however one cannot fail to notice that a certain gulf has arisen between the life of our parishes and the presence and participation of a generation or two of young people often in our Catholic schools. Equally true is that many parishes are finding it increasingly difficult to reach out in their mission to young people, due to

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lack of energy and resources from priests and people. The field of active evangelisation is still relatively uncharted waters for many of us.

➤ Equally true, I think we have to acknowledge that our Catholic primary and secondary schools have not been about primarily evangelising young people, but rather educating them within a Catholic environment (which is itself under considerable pressure today). Some school leaders are now beginning to re-orient themselves to the challenges facing Catholic education today. They make serious efforts to be supportive of existing faith, but staff (if they are Catholic and practising) do not have the time (or necessarily the skills) to spend nurturing 'new faith.' Chaplains have more scope for this, but have a uphill task in some of our large secondary schools of 1000 students (many of whom are from non-practising/non-Catholic families). It is true that parents have traditionally introduced their children to the Faith, but if this is not happening now, it is perhaps unreal to expect the schools to be able to pick this up with no extra resources or training. Parishes *and* Schools need to work even more closely together to see how we can help each other in the work of mission and evangelisation.

6. ...and A Diocesan Strategy

The Diocese needs to move quickly towards a three-pronged approach to Youth Ministry. Such a strategy involving all should significantly increase the impact and consistency of the Church's Ministry to Young People. With the three *Diocesan Aims for Youth Ministry* clearly in mind for youngsters in our schools, colleges and parishes, such a *Diocesan Strategy* would include:

I. Youth Mission Team

We have been encouraged to think seriously about the establishment of a Youth Mission Team within the Diocese following on the example and inspiration of successful initiatives such as YMT (Hexham & Newcastle Youth Mission Team), the *Sion* Community, *Youth 2000*, *ANIMATE*, *Living Water*...The idea is to have a 'peer ministry' approach with trained young people

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ministering to other young people in missions to parishes, schools, youth clubs, sacramental preparation etc.

In faith and in prayer, we have set our sights on capitalising on the generosity of young people and are now searching for a small group to commit themselves for a year to living their faith and sharing it through ministry, answering the call of the late John Paul II for '*young people to evangelise the young*'.

Living in the community of the mission team will help the volunteers themselves to grow and mature in Faith, living a shared life of community and working closely as a team. Just as Christ took the Twelve to Himself and formed them, so in the year the volunteers are formed in the image of our Lord through catechesis, community living and most importantly prayer. Then just like the Apostles they will be formed in the Spirit and commissioned to go out and draw others to a life-changing encounter with the Lord.

- II. We should aim to make even more use of the wonderful resource and tradition of working with young people established at ***Castlerigg Manor*** (since 1969) and look again how the Manor with its work of "personal, social and spiritual development of young people" could further the three *Aims of Youth Ministry in the Diocese* today. (Follow-up residential retreats on the work of the *Youth Mission Team* could indeed take place there as part of their programme. This would be an vital part of a *Diocesan Strategy for Youth Ministry*).

- III. The work of the *Youth Mission Team* and *Castlerigg Manor* will never be ends in themselves, but always leading to ongoing ***Outreach programmes*** in and around the Diocese - in parishes, deaneries, schools/colleges etc which would we hope, in turn encourage Christian discipleship and leadership at every level throughout our Diocese, but most especially in the young peoples'

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places of work and especially felt in their local parishes. This is why I would hope that the evangelical impact of the missions led by *Diocesan Youth Mission Team* and the follow-up retreats at *Castlerigg* would feed and enthuse faith-filled young people back into the life and ministry of local parishes.

- a. First, parishes need to be a place where young people are welcomed, grow in Jesus Christ, and minister side by side with the adults of the community). In parishes, young people need feel a sense of belonging and acceptance as valued members of the community if they are to identify themselves with the Church.

- b. Second, parishes should have programmes/activities for young people that recognize their special talents and contribution in the life of the Church. They have much to give to the parish community: youthfulness, energy, vitality, hopefulness, and vision. Especially important is the interaction with those who have made a lifetime commitment to serving the Church as priests, and religious; young people need to know that such service is both rewarding and fulfilling.

- c. Third, if parishes are to be worthy of the loyalty and active participation of youth, they will need to become "youth-friendly" communities in which youth have a conspicuous presence in parish life. These are parish communities that value young people—welcoming them into their midst; listening to them; responding to their needs; supporting them with prayer, time, facilities, and resources.

Guiding and facilitating this local energy would be the responsibility of the *Diocesan Youth Officer, Local Youth Outreach Workers and their Local Management Groups and Deanery Youth Councils/Forums*. Also key will be the role of the *Diocesan Youth Officer* to organise opportunities for training and networking of *Local Youth Outreach Workers* and *Parish/Deanery Volunteers* on whom we greatly rely.

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7. Conclusion

The faith formation of our young people is one of the most important elements of the Mission and Ministry of the Church. I have seen for myself that the young people of the Diocese are generous, open and willing to give of themselves in service of others. We cannot afford to allow this timely opportunity to pass us by as we search to consolidate our youth efforts and re-orient the direction of Youth Ministry in the Diocese. In faith and in prayer I sincerely hope that we might move forward together in the work of the Lord. I would ask that this document be now forwarded to the *Youth Service Management Group* for their careful consideration and also for consultation and reflection among the following groups:

- University Chaplains
- Sixth Form College Chaplains
- Castlerigg Manor Tutorial Staff
- The Diocesan Youth Officer and the Local Outreach workers
- Chaplains to Secondary Schools
- Secondary Heads and Heads of RE Departments
- The Diocesan Vocations Director
- The Diocesan Education Service
- The Diocesan Music Scholarship Scheme

I would hope to arrange a *Diocesan Youth Forum Meeting* for all the above with the Bishop and the *Youth Service Management Group* in late September where we can gather and take on board this vision, together with further suggestions on how we might move this *Vision for Youth Ministry* forward into focused action.

Sincerest good wishes, thanks, and prayers,

As ever in Christ our Lord,



Bishop of Lancaster