

Catholic Youth Plan of the Diocese of Georgetown



REBUILDING YOUTH MINISTRY: THROUGH PRAYERS, FAITH & VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT

YEAR: 2017 – 2022

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Executive Summary

Youth represent an untapped, yet neglected resource within the Church, despite recognition that harnessing their potential is vital, for achieving the Church's mission in Guyana. This report acknowledges also our Christian duty to help youths grow into full communion with Jesus and each other.

Efforts to address the needs and opportunities inherent in our young people, have been underway for many years, becoming institutionalised in part through a Youth Department. More recently, the 2013 Diocesan Assembly – occurring in the Year of Faith – placed significant attention on better meeting the needs of youth.

Bishop Alleyne initiated the process of developing this 5-year youth plan in mid-2016, and entrusted the Youth Board, via the Youth Coordinator, with spearheading the effort to develop this plan. These in turn engaged youth themselves to draft the content of the plan, content that will be shared with parishes in order to obtain inputs and finalise the plan.

In summary, this plan recognises three categories of youth: those who are *disinterested, interested but lacking capacities*, and *interested and capable, but facing adversity*. Each of these three categories has distinctive features that call for different approaches. This plan details what lies behind each category. For example, this plan identifies that disinterested youth arise from such things as boring liturgies, a lack of understanding of the Catholic Church, and modernity (technology, materialism etc.)

Notwithstanding the detailing of causes, the main focus of this plan is on presenting options for responding to the challenges at hand. Since these challenges are largely at the local level, local peculiarities need to be catered for in the choice of responses. As such, this plan does not use a one-size-fits-all approach. Rather, response options are presented for consideration with the ultimate choice of options to be determined by parishes. Options to be considered at the national/Diocesan level are also included.

To ease the choice of response options by parishes, this plan presents options using three time horizons: immediate, short-term and long-term. Within these horizons, response options are presented within the three earlier identified categories of youth.

As needed and possible, the Youth Department can assist parishes to assess their situation, build parish capacities to grasp opportunities for addressing youth needs, determine response option choices and support their implementation. The Youth Department will spearhead those options occurring at the level of the Diocese, such as youth camps, sports competitions etc.

1. Introduction

This Youth Plan is a work in progress that has its genesis in the 2013 Diocesan Assembly. In July of 2016, Bishop Alleyne initiated steps to build upon the outputs from the Assembly as related to youth, and tasked the Youth Coordinator with preparing this Plan. The Coordinator was greatly helped in this assignment by many others, as outlined in the conclusion section of this document.

Youths are the stronghold that contains great potential to provide a better tomorrow; being the future of the Church and Nation. Youths must be encouraged, supported and empowered to fully realize their potential. However, due to various factors, youth involvement in the Church has significantly dropped.

It can be noted that the amount of active and supportive Youth groups have dwindled over the years. There are currently an estimated 15 "active" youth groups within the church at large, and due to inconsistencies, resources and capacity issues; many Youths have turned away from the Church. It should be our duty to ensure the revitalization of the involvement of Youths within the varying Parishes and act as a solace and comfort for them. In today's society we constantly hear the phrase "Youths are the future of tomorrow" But are we really? No, we are the "Youths of today-the present".

Creating a strong platform requires both technical aspects, in which the Youth Board hopes to create, and the spiritual realization and empowerment of youths. Without a vision and grace of guidance from the Holy Spirit, nothing can be achieved. Everything must be in cohesion in order to achieve harmony.

This is the goal of this Youth action plan; to plan and implement a foundation on which youth can build on and facilitate for the current and next generations to come for youths to find their faith and identity. This plan does not only reach out to Catholics but those affiliated and associated, as well as anyone else who needs support. This plan addresses the three major issues within the church body;

- Disinterest
- Interested, however lacking support and resources
- Those willing and able but face adversity.

The Youth Board has discussed and collected feedback from the varying Parishes through youth representation on these issues. This building block will be planned for the next 5 years, from which effects take place within the first year. Many long term benefits arise from this plan and create more opportunities afterwards. It has been realized that we cannot cater for every youth; however we can provide resources and opportunities.

2. The Challenges Facing Youths

a) Disinterested Youth

Disinterest is the state of not being influenced personally with the involvement in something or just having no concern. What causes Youths to be disinterested in their Catholic faith?

Some suggestions are:

- They lack a clear understanding of their faith
- The feeling of “Mass is boring”
- Migration to other countries/communities
- They are distracted by living a materialistic more than a spiritual way
- Perception of God to be unforgiving and unyielding; they’re ashamed or guilty to go back to church.
- Feeling of being unwelcomed and not appreciated
- Insecurities of some parents
- Lack of motivation towards youth within Catholic churches

They do not understand their Faith

Some youths are not too clear on the meaning of signs and symbols of our Catholic Church. This lack of knowledge leave them easily influenced by the negativity shared in the media or from non-Catholics.

In our Catholic faith, signs and symbols help us to have a more precise concept as to why certain things are done the way they are. Youth today are easily influenced by negative propaganda about the cross; the significance of some numbers alluding to evil things and the assumption that we worship Mary, Saints and statues in our church. However, not everything we hear is true. This can lead to disinterest in their Catholic faith.

Mass is boring (Stigma and perspective of boring)

Youth’s perspective that mass is boring, the music is dreary and the church is ritualistic is increasing. Some perceive that the sermon should be more precise: that the priest’s homily does not inspire them. Also, foreign accents of some priests are very strong and hence they misinterpret or lose interest in what is being said. Regarding music, a lack of instruments causes some to say that "they don't feel the Spirit ".

Active participation in the mass, will help youths to grow in their faith and self-confidence. It will create a feeling of appreciation and help to motivate youths to be more active in the church.

Migration to other countries or other communities

We cannot control, but hope that youths attend, participate in Mass & church activity wherever they relocate.

Distracted by living a materialistic way more than a spiritualistic way

In today's world, technology seems to be spearheading everything. Our social life occurs over a screen that fits comfortably in our hands for communication. Easy access to various apps and messengers on our fancy gadgets creates an opportunity to chat and post pictures of moments for everyone to see. But in the long run, do we really NEED these gadgets to communicate? Would the people we communicate with always be there for us? We've lost the need for personal relationship with each other and most importantly, with our God. Our decline in spiritual value and increase in material desires creates disinterest in the church.

Perception of God to be unforgiving and unyielding: They're ashamed or guilty to go back to church

When our relationship with God and even families are broken, we stray away from the church and its teachings. Whether it be at our jobs, with friends or in our daily lives, we all try to survive. Some situations may become challenging and overwhelming. Do We Lose Faith? Do We Lose Hope? We tend to feel that no one would understand or we are unworthy of being forgiven; God is merciful and always willing to forgive and accept us back to him. Youths should be encouraged not to give up or lose hope regardless of their failures.

People in church should be more welcoming (solace in church)

'Church is a home away from home'. A home is somewhere one should find love, security, a sense of belonging, comfort and compassion. Youths sometimes feel that they are unwanted and used in some ways. E.g, they are only called upon when there's an event in church. The first thought of leaders would be "to get the youths involved," after which, there's no gratitude shown towards them? Not everything we do deserves a medal, but rather, we deserve to be appreciated in order to feel that we too, are part of the Church.

The insecurities of some parents causes children to lack interest in participating in some activities.

Some youths do not participate or ask their parents to participate in any activity, because they fear rejection. Youths need to socialize, indulge in different cultures and meet new people since it's from these very experiences, we learn different things. With constant rejection, we lose interest in church and any activity. Parents should motivate their children by allowing them to participate in various activities. Should there be security concerns, they too can attend and observe, whilst lending support and familiarizing with the coordinators, so that in future, they can allow their children to attend activities without insecurity issues.

Lack of motivation towards youth within Catholic churches

Are youths being encouraged enough? Is the church playing an active role in utilizing and keeping youths within the Church, ecstatic to participate and a constant motivation to be consistently active within the church?

b) Interested, but lacking support and resources

Youths within the diocese are willing to be active in their Parish, however, there's a loss of trust and dedication. There are several factors that can be considered as reason for this lack of full participation;

- As youths, we accept the fact that we aren't always correct even though we can argue why we genuinely think we are. However, youth activities tend to get us excited. We can, if allowed, make preparations before the actual activity is fully determined upon. Sometimes in planning, things may get complicated or misunderstood. The activity then quickly fades, without an explanation as to what went wrong and where we can be corrected, all our anticipations also fades and we lose hope. This causes disinterest and future collaboration between youths and adults in the church. If there's an error in our planning, instead of ridicule or shun down our ideas completely, we'd rather our leaders come up with solutions to our problems even if it means they themselves take part in what we had originally planned, so as to build self-confidence within us. Youth has a desire to participate in activities, but are uncertain either because of the attitudes of our elderly parishioners, or their parents.
- Youths are relationally driven, hence there's a constant desire for activities for them to interact with others. When an activity is consistent, we look forward to that. If there's a pause in events, youths tend to get discouraged. Young people like to be active in their Parish, however, lack of activities organised by Parishes to keep them occupied caused them to become bored and ceased participation. It can either be that they are willing, but not getting enough support needed or they resort to only attending High Masses and fund day etc.
- Some young people throughout the diocese are attending catholic churches, however, are non-Catholic. They are willing to participate fully in the church's activities, but due to their status, they cannot; elders in the church are not encouraging them join the process of becoming a Catholic. Parents also, sometimes contributes to this dilemma, the child may want to be converted, but because their parents being non-Catholic, they do not allow their child to become a Catholic.
- Another reason for non-involvement in church activities can be due to the way youth perceive the structure of the liturgy. It seems either too boring or they just don't understand. When asked how it can be improved, they sometimes give suggestions but leaders think it should not be changed, since they came and met things that way and they (leaders) are comfortable with the way it is.
- Catechists do not encourage children to take part in activities at an early age when they are more willing to participate. Youths are only encouraged to participate when they're about to leave the Sunday school programme. This causes youths to feel that they are being pressured, since they didn't get the support from their teacher in previous classes. They are then asked to go into various Ministries within the church (service project)

thinking that they participate for the sake of confirmation, thus, after confirmation, they no longer want to be a part of that Ministry.

- Some youths exercise “free will” and make choices to find what they perceive as happiness. Some choose to make their own decisions, which may be done independently or influenced by peers. These decisions may cause youths to “church hop” to different denominations or Parishes in the Catholic Church. They have a desire to attend church, but no support is given for them to be stable. Sometimes Youths choose to stay in the church they visited, because they feel more comfortable or it's livelier.

c) Willing and able, but facing adversity

Youths in the Catholic Church face much adversity, even when they are interested, willing and capable. These are willing to be more involved, offer a helping hand, and can be depended upon and give their opinions. However, these types of youth are barricaded by the adversities that they face, even after crossing hurdles relating to interest and capabilities. In this section, we will look at some of the adversities faced by young Catholics in Guyana.

Lack of support

- Youths within the Catholic Church are calling for more support from parents, older folks, as well as fellow youths like themselves. Youths complain about their ideas being rejected and not pondered upon, as well as the known issue of lack of adult and parish support during youth events.
- Some youths are willing and interested in becoming involved in Church activities, even in taking leadership responsibilities, however, due to work, studies and family, a commitment cannot be established. Other commitments such as school, lessons or work, raises questions of priority/prioritization, thus further accents on the fact that the current generation has more roles and responsibilities as time progresses. However, to the inference, have we not expressed the importance of the Catholic faith that it is no longer a priority? If we overlook the fact, that we, have neglected to emphasize the importance of the Catholic faith and the body of the church as a major priority, then how can we not expect the younger generations to follow suit.
- Criticism towards youths is constantly being overlooked. Youths within the Catholic Church face a surmountable amount of negative criticism rather than constructive criticism.
- Youths within the Catholic Church are always being highlighted on the “wrong” actions that they may be executing, without any form of positive encouragement and guidance. Sometimes as an adult or authoritative figure within the church; the way in which we communicate, becomes equally as important, as what exactly is being communicated.

Family struggles

- Within some blended families parents may originate from different religious backgrounds; thus, conflicts of interest may arise with regard to religious beliefs.
- With each parent having a different religious belief or background, it becomes hard to maintain consistency at a particular place of worship. While the youth may be willing to participate in a particular activity on a specified date, that day may be the designated date to share in the other parent's faith belief; thus resulting in either going to church with them or partaking in the activity.
- Families facing financial difficulties that live distant from catholic churches, may find it difficult to attend church consistently, especially in cases where personal transportation is not available.
- In some situations, a family might be faced with financial difficulty, thus, are forced to prioritize their expenditures. Parishioners may not be involved or associated with the parish closest to home, but rather one in which they have connections with. The parish may be located a great distance and travel becomes a heavy cost. With this, the church is disregarded as a necessity/priority and is placed far behind human necessities such as food and household sustainability. This also give rise to non-attendance at mass.

Discrimination and stereotyping

- Youths occasionally feel that they are being discriminated against; Title's such as "Young People". "Young people are irresponsible" or "Young people are always late" are often used. Some youths are not given a fair chance due to every youth being associated with these stigma.

Generational Gap

- It is obvious that the generational gap is an actuality. Society has been constantly evolving from its inception, thus, people as a whole, are being influenced and forced to adapt and change. Some refuse to accept and acknowledge change, thus, varying views conflicts as each generation exist, the conflict being the way in which a task or item is to be conducted, carried out or established. Each with differential value, not necessarily "wrong" but just different. The lack of open-mindedness, willingness to change or compromise and listen, are issues within, that drive each effort to a downfall as collaboration and communication are attempted. This may become detrimental towards the future of the church.

Lack of Youth fellowship

- Youths in general, feel there is not enough youth fellowship among their peers. Youth fellowship is foreseen, to encourage youths to attend church and consistently involve them, even as self-motivation is at a standstill.

Problems in catechetical formation

- There is a lack of “service” being taught in the Sunday school programs. Being of service to others at home, school, or at church, should be something that is engraved in youth. So that, rather than it being a burden when we called upon to volunteer, we should be ready and willing (as professed at confirmation). Children however, are given too many options; “Do you want to do this, that or neither?” If we let them decide, they will choose neither, unless we put them to do something. When they understand the meaning of “service”, they develop a spirit of willingness to always assist in the church. We then find that they would return, knowing that they are appreciated, at doing something.
- In the Sunday school program, children are taught from a teachers’ manual from the Books 'Year A to Year F' with Year F leading to Confirmation. Confirmation for some can be seen as a 'Graduation ceremony' from church. This is highly prevalent in most parishes. Youths mainly come back to church for the important activities such as Lent (mainly Good Friday Service) and Advent (Christmas Mass). At Confirmation, we received the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Hence, we should be Stewards and disciples to spread His word in order to encourage others to come to church. Service is something that children should be taught at a young age.

3. The Opportunities to Strengthen Youth

a) More Interest

To engage the youth in a greater capacity in the Catholic church of Guyana, we must instill a sense of community and reliability. These two aspects; community and reliability, allow the youth within the church to be more interested and therefore more involved in activities. The amount of opportunities and activities available for youth is not dependent on the quantity, but rather the quality. By ensuring the quality of events and opportunities available for the youth, it will reinforce a reliable and organized Youth Office of the Church. In addition, offering consistent programs in the church, habits are formed; a habit that will hopefully become a regular youth program available to all.

Another way to increase interest among youth involvement would be to create a community. Youth and young adults are drawn to communities and activities to which they feel a sense of belonging and care; fostering a sense of community and by getting to know one another personally and by serving with one another, camaraderie develops. Camaraderie is the base foundation of youth ministry and hopefully with time, it will foster the development of deep and life-long friendships that will support our youth spiritually, and throughout all their life endeavors.

b) More Capacity

With added capacity, educational opportunities should be more readily available to the youths, especially those that are not comprehensive in reading and writing skills. Once an individual has an inclination of the skills mentioned earlier, to some extent that person will seek understanding. (Ask questions)

Young people entering the priesthood and religious life should feel welcomed and appreciated; an establishment of a committee can boost this system.

A strong belief that we are and belong to the Body of Christ, with this being said, a Youth Seminar should be held bearing the title 'I am! And belong deeply, to the Body of Christ'. Hence the agenda will be built around the title e.g. the use of scripture that highlights this aspect etc.

More faith building activities; the Ministries within the church should be encouraged to engage in small talks within their respective Ministry, to help with the growth of their Faith, whereas in time, the discussion can be spread throughout the congregation at large. Secondly, the voice of youths must be heard and addressed reserving a special day of every month to listen, this provides an opportunity to become aware of the Youth's level of interest. Therefore projects, programs etc. can be designed to suit their interest resulting in high participation.

Three essentials for continued involvement of the youths:

1. Formation
2. Sustainability
3. Stay within the interest of the youths

c) Less Adversity

- *More support by the adult and parents in the church* – Parents and adults play an important role in church and spiritual development for youths; encouragement to come to church and guidance where necessary. Youths may need education about their faith, adult and parental figures could fill this gap
- *Less restriction, less criticism and more motivation / constructive talk* – Youth's ideas and opinions should be heard and respected and where necessary pointed in the right direction and corrected in a dignified, yet nurturing manner; youths' aspirations and ideas should be considered greatly when decisions are being made. Sensitize leaders on the difficulty faced by Youths to approach them, and the hostility meted out to youths by church elders.
- *More faith and trust given to youth by the elders in the church* – Adults having more trust and faith in youth, so that they can voice their own concerns and make informed decisions.
- *Youth having more access to resource in the church* – With access to more resources, the youth would be more taken up and involve in more church activities and can teach and inspire other upcoming youth to be more active. E.g. forming a choir/ youth group, planning fund-raisers.

- *More activities in the church for the youth to take part in at a young age* – When youth are given more activities in church at a young age they learn to be more responsible and mature in thinking, they are more likely to be involve in church as they grow older.
- *Having more interaction in mass / services* between the celebrant and the youths would get the attention/ interest of the youths; they would want to be more involve in mass/services and learn more about their faith.
- *Youth's programs/ forums* – Having a youth program/ forums every month will keep the youths looking forward for something; they won't lose interest in the church E.g. Movie Night, Bible Quiz, etc. Also create settings for youths to have open conversations on sensitive issues affecting them, such as teenage pregnancy, drugs, fornication etc.
- Counselling sessions should be done in the church – Knowing they have someone confidential to talk to or confide in, would be much appreciated, because they know that they wouldn't have to face their problems alone.

4. Response Options

The responsibility for determining youth needs, lies primarily with the parish. Having reviewed the type or types of challenges being faced by youth, parishes may consider the following options for local actions in choosing responses that are most appropriate to their situation.

The Diocesan Youth Department can be approached for support and partnership. Other Diocesan bodies, particularly the Catechetical Department, the Stewardship Commission and the Family Life Commission will be important partners in the implementation of this plan.

In summary, the following response options are divided over time according to the categories of immediate/short-term/long-term, and with a view to recognising the different needs, across youths that are either disinterested, interested but lacking capacities, or willing and able but facing diversity.

Taken together, the locally and appropriately chosen responses will produce changes to the following present day statistics:

No. Of Parishes/Communities in Diocese

No. Of Active Youth Groups

15 + Confirmation from Reg.# 5,6,8 & 9

No. of Conformants in 2015-16

No. Actively involved in Parishes