The Vision of Catholic Youth Ministry

The Vision of Catholic Youth Ministry

Fundamentals, Theory, and Practice

Robert J. McCarty, DMin, General Editor

with
Laurie Delgatto, Rev. Tom Dunne, SDB, Michelle Hernandez, Jeffrey Kaster, Leif Kehrwald, Maggie McCarty, Frank Mercadante, Greg "Dobie" Moser, Barbara A. Murray, Randy Raus, Sean Reynolds, Tony Tamberino, Terri Telepak, and Anne-Marie Yu-Phelps

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With admiration and appreciation for my colleagues who are passionate about the practice and profession of Catholic youth ministry and through whose efforts we now have comprehensive ministry formation and competency-based standards for the field, . . . and with gratitude for those Catholic youth ministry leaders whose commitment to the young Church spurs them to pursue professional ministerial development.

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Introduction

This textbook is long overdue! The practice and profession of Catholic youth ministry has grown significantly, as evidenced by the increased number of youth ministry coordinators in parishes, campus ministry coordinators in schools, and independent ministry providers serving parishes and dioceses. Likewise the range of responsibilities assigned to diocesan offices of youth ministry has expanded to include consultations and direct services, leadership development and certification processes, pastoral care and crisis response, adolescent catechesis, and training for youth protection and safe environments. Some dioceses have combined youth ministry, college-campus ministry, and young-adult ministry into a single office. However, while providing more effective coordination of ministry, expanding responsibilities often do not include increased staff and budget resources.

The context for youth ministry has also changed. Increasingly, youth ministry encompasses young people from early adolescence through early young adulthood. Further, a significant and intentional ministry to young people is now found in cultural and ethnic communities. The family and social contexts of young people have also become important emphases in ministry.

A Historical Context

An interesting piece of youth ministry trivia is identifying the first organized program for Catholic young people. In 1930 Bishop Bernard J. Sheil, in Chicago, launched the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) with his boxing program, responding to the need for youth to have alternatives to hanging out on the streets. The original CYO charter describes its purpose in this way: "To promote among Catholic youth a recreational, educational, and religious program that will adequately meet their physical, mental, and spiritual needs in their after school hours . . . while instilling in their minds and hearts a true love of God and country" (*Hope for the Decade,* p. 4). Organized ministry with young people had arrived.

For the past thirty-some years, and perhaps since Vatican II and its vision of Church and ministry gave impetus to the explosion in lay ministry, a vision for youth ministry has been unfolding in the Catholic Church. Its roots are in the Catholic youth work of the 1950s and 1960s, best exemplified by the Catholic Youth Organization and its five components of religious, athletic, cultural, social, and service activities; and the Confraternity for Christian Doctrine, which was responsible for the religious education of Catholic youth in public schools, in the Catholic school system, and in myriad youth movements and programs such as the Young Catholic Students, Catholic scouting, Sodality, Columbian Squires, and other youth organizations.

During the 1960s and 1970s, other expressions of youth ministry were instituted, including Teens Encounter Christ (TEC), SEARCH, other similar retreat programs, and the Knights of Saint Peter Claver. Cultural and ethnic communities; urban, suburban, and rural communities; and various sections of the country all developed approaches to youth ministry specific to the needs and gifts of their young people.

In 1972 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), then known as the United States Catholic Conference (USCC), published the document *The Diocesan Youth Director* to "assist youth directors in clarifying objectives and to help them determine specific programs for youth in their dioceses." The same document states:

> [There is] a need for a total program for youth's leisure hours . . . to enable youth to engage in the work of the Church in the world; to bring a specific focus to the work of religious education, namely education for mission . . . by creating and supporting programs and projects that provide an opportunity for youth to engage in activities that exemplify what it means to be Christian in the world today; to interpret youth and advocate their concerns; to provide services that answer the real needs of youth. (From *Hope for the Decade,* p. 2)

This was the first in a series of national documents that developed a unified vision of youth ministry.

In 1975 the USCC advisory board for youth activities commissioned a paper on total youth ministry as an in-depth study of the

field. Published in 1976, *A Vision of Youth Ministry* identified dimensions, components, and principles of the multifaceted nature of youth ministry. Providing this shared vision was a significant contribution to the field of youth ministry.

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, youth ministry became an established reality at various levels: dioceses opened youth ministry offices or changed the name of existing offices to reflect a growing understanding of youth ministry, the first parish youth ministry coordinators were hired, colleges offered workshops and courses, and training programs for youth and adults were developed. Building on *A Vision of Youth Ministry,* the Church's approach became more comprehensive, and the field and practice of youth ministry became more professional.

In 1982 the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM) was established, creating a network for diocesan offices and providing resources, leadership, and vision for the ministry. A series of documents on adolescent catechesis, evangelization, and liturgy and prayer, written in consultation with practitioners in youth ministry, further clarified various dimensions of the ministry. The role of the coordinator of youth ministry was also solidified as a ministry career through the development of competency-based standards by the NFCYM, first published in 1991 and revised in 2003. The standards identify the knowledge and skills integral to the profession and professionalism of youth ministry leaders. The competency-based standards also provide a framework for the development of systematic adult training and certification models.

The decade of the nineties was characterized by an expanding understanding of youth ministry. Evangelization, social justice, and pastoral care were more fully integrated into the ministry. Various youth movements continued to develop. Organizations such as the National African American Catholic Youth Ministry Network and the National Catholic Network Pastoral Juvenil Hispana focused on cultural and ethnic communities. Training and leadership development programs for youth and for adults were well established. And Catholic publishers developed practical resources and catechetical materials to support the ministry.

Of particular note, in August 1993 Pope John Paul II and World Youth Day came to Denver, and national attention was directed toward the young Catholic Church by both the secular press and

Church authorities. The quiet but steady growth of youth ministry now gained public prominence.

The 1997 document *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* signaled an important era in ministry. Whereas the original *Vision of Youth Ministry* document was published by a department at the USCC, *Renewing the Vision* was a mandate of the entire National Conference of Catholic Bishops and confirmed what had been happening throughout the field of youth ministry. The ministry now called upon the entire Church community to see themselves as ministers to young people. Youth are called to responsible participation in the pastoral and liturgical life of the faith community. Perhaps one of the most significant shifts in youth ministry in the past decade is the attention to families as the primary context for young people, and therefore an important dimension of comprehensive youth ministry. The family, the parish, and the larger social community are now the arena for ministry to young people. And dioceses and colleges recognize the need and desire for systematic formation and academic credentialing for the profession of the Catholic youth ministry leader.

The Vision of Catholic Youth Ministry: Fundamentals, Theory, and Practice

The need for this textbook reflects the growth in the profession and practice of Catholic youth ministry. With the growth of diocesan ministry formation programs and college degree and certificate programs, having a foundational text to accompany the core youth ministry documents will provide a common language along with the shared vision.

It is appropriate that this text was written not by a sole author but by a team of competent and passionate practitioners, reflecting the collaborative nature of ministry. The purpose of the text is to provide an introduction to a Catholic understanding and approach to youth ministry, based on *Renewing the Vision* and the *General Directory for Catechesis*. The following chapters describe a theology for

youth ministry, break open more fully the goals and components of comprehensive youth ministry, and provide a snapshot of young people today. This textbook also considers the integral dimensions of family and culture in youth ministry, as well as the specific setting of youth ministry in a Catholic school. Further, the inclusion of chapters on youth ministry leadership and organizing for youth ministry provide direction for creating practical structures to assure and support the ministry.

This is an introductory textbook; it is not an encyclopedia of Catholic youth ministry methods and techniques, nor is it designed to be the definitive treatment of components and dimensions. Rather, this textbook provides an overview with pastoral implications and questions to encourage readers to consider practical applications to their ministry setting. Further, a bibliography refers readers to additional resources, which will provide an in-depth understanding of the components and dimensions.

We are challenged to build on the past eighty years of organized Catholic youth ministry. As we create an ever-evolving vision and approach to ministry to, with, by, and for the young Church, we remember the central mission of calling young people to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Welcome to a noble adventure!

Chapter 1

Theology and Catholic Youth Ministry

Rev. Tom Dunne, SDB

Introduction

As the Catholic youth ministry community grows toward its thirtieth year since the publication of *A Vision of Youth Ministry,* in 1976, it is important that those engaged in youth ministry establish the foundations of its mission for its own faithfulness to the Gospel and for those who will carry on this ministry in the years to come.

Objectives

This chapter explores the nature of the relationship between youth ministry and theology, proposes a number of basic theological principles that underlie Catholic youth ministry, and offers some concrete pastoral applications for integrating a theological consciousness into the practice of Catholic youth ministry.

Obstacles to Overcome

To many in the Catholic youth ministry community, the study of theology seems to be irrelevant, theoretical, intimidating, and potentially divisive:

- "There is so much to do in the parish that I don't have the time or energy to study the theological foundations of our ministry."
- "Theology is not practical enough. It doesn't directly relate to my ministry."
- "There are so many areas of study in theology, where would I start? I feel unprepared and overwhelmed."
- "I don't want to get caught up in those divisive theological debates. I only want to proclaim the Good News of Jesus."

Theology and Catholic Youth Ministry

Theology can be defined quite simply in the words of Saint Anselm (d. 1109): "faith seeking understanding." A modern-day theologian offered the following definition:

> Theology may be defined as the study which, through participation in and reflection upon a religious faith, seeks to express the content of this faith in the clearest and most coherent language available. (John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology,* 2nd ed., p. 1)

Youth ministry must be understood in terms of the mission and ministry of the whole Church, the community of persons who believe in Jesus Christ and continue his saving work through the action of the Holy Spirit. The earlier of the two guiding documents for Catholic youth ministry, *A Vision of Youth Ministry*, offers this basic description:

> The Church's mission is three-fold: to proclaim the good news of salvation; to offer itself as a group of people transformed by the Spirit into a community of faith, hope, and love; and to bring God's justice and love to others through service in its individual, social, and political dimensions. (P. 3)

The document relied on ecclesiology (a theology of the Church) to provide the theological foundation for youth ministry, drawing from the teachings of Vatican II as interpreted, in part, by a contemporary theologian. The writers of the earlier document, *A Vision of Youth Ministry,* relied most heavily on *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)* and *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*.

Twenty years later, research demonstrated that *A Vision of Youth Ministry* was effective in promoting the new approach for Catholic youth ministry. The 1996 study of parish youth ministry program participants, *New Directions in Youth Ministry,* found that participation in parish youth ministry programs had a positive effect on both young people and parish life itself (as reported in *Renewing the Vision*, p. 5). The research also demonstrated a close connection

between pastoral practice and the understanding of ecclesiology found in *A Vision of Youth Ministry*. However, that document limited its ecclesiology, for the most part, to the local church or parish.

Following up on the encouraging results from their research, the U.S. bishops commissioned a document to give renewed vision and form to the new situation in which the Church and young people found themselves. In defining the foundational assumptions of this updated vision, the writers of *Renewing the Vision* remedied the disconnect between youth ministry and the larger Church. They brought together the teachings of Pope John Paul II, the pastoral experience and reflections of the Catholic youth ministry community, and the pastoral statements of the U.S. bishops.

Renewing the Vision states this new foundational principle of youth ministry in its first and primary goal: "To help young people learn what it means to follow Jesus Christ and to live as disciples today, empowering them to serve others and to work toward a world built on the vision and values of the reign of God" (p. 9). Instead of centering Catholic youth ministry on the local Church community or the youth ministry community, *Renewing the Vision* expands the notion of Church to the entire Catholic faith community. By participating in all aspects of the broader Church life, young people grow in faith "as they experience life in community and actively participate in the mission of Jesus Christ and his Church" (p. 11). In formulating this new vision and framework for Catholic youth ministry, the writers of *Renewing the Vision* define the nature and mission of the Church as centered on God's Reign.

The effect of broadening the theological foundations of Catholic youth ministry is nothing short of radical. The themes of Catholic youth ministry enumerated in *Renewing the Vision* flow out of this changed understanding. By inviting and empowering "young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world today" (p. 9) through "responsible participation in the life, mission, and work of the Catholic faith community" (p. 11), ministry with the young moves beyond a ministry centered on "my parish" or "my youth group." Instead, *Renewing the Vision* points to a new reality in which Catholic youth ministry takes place in a context that is as broad as the Church itself: family friendly, multicultural, intergenerational, communitywide.

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The statistics on children in single-parent homes on page 179 are from "American Association for Single People," at *www.singlesrights.com/main.html,* accessed December 15, 2004.

The information on mothers who are employed outside the home on page 179 is from the FamilyEducation.com Web site, at *familyeducation.com/home,* accessed December 15, 2004.

The excerpt on page 184 is from "Pastoral Visit in Australia, *Homily of John Paul II,* Perth, Australia, November 30, 1986," number 3, at *www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/1986/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19861130_perth-australia_en.html,* accessed December 15, 2004.

The quotation and excerpt by Virgilio Elizondo on pages 189 and 189–190 are from *Multicultural Religious Education*, edited by Barbara Wilkerson (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1997), pages 397–398 and 397. Copyright © 1997 by Religious Education Press.

The excerpt about the bishops' statement on page 193 is from *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual*

Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers, at *www.usccb.org/laity/always.htm,* accessed December 15, 2004. Copyright © 1997 by the USCCB, Inc.

The excerpt on pages 218–219 is from *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry,* by Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1998), page 30. Copyright © 1998 by Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster.

The bulleted summary lists of the National Certification Standards on pages 233–234 are adapted from *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers,* by the National Association for Lay Ministry (NALM), the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL), and the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM) (Washington, DC: NALM, NCCL, NFCYM, 2003), pages 1–11, respectively. Copyright © 2003 by the NALM, NCCL, and NFCYM.

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Endnotes Cited in Quotations from Documents Copyrighted by the USCCB

1. National Catechetical Directory NCCB. 1976, 176d.
2. Cf. John Paul II, apostolic exhortation, *Catechesi tradendae* 1; 2.
3. AG 14.
4. Cf. AG 13; EN 10; RM 46; VS 66; RCIA 10.
5. EN 14.
6. EN 20; cf. EN 63; RM 52.
7. DCG (1971) 19d.
8. Cf. DCG (1971), 21.
9. *"Declaration of the Synod Fathers,"* 4: L'Osservatore Romano (27 October 1974), p. 6.
10. 1 *Pt* 3:15.
11. *Dei Verbum* 8.
12. See *CCC* #1069–1090.
13. At the Youth and Worship Summit meeting in October 1994, one participant described the goal as a "full court press" of dialogue and action among local leaders to respond to the challenges of involving youth in worship.
14. See *CCC* #1074-1075; 2688.
15. Sr. Thea Bowman, FSPA, adapted the phrase "It Takes a Whole Church" from the Ghanian proverb "It takes a village to raise a child."