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Report on the

Survey of Young People, Youth Leaders
and Parish Youth Activities

for

Melbourne Catholic Archdiocesan Office for Youth

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Executive Summary

The Christian Research Association has been undertaking research in the youth ministry area for several years. Since 2002, the research team has met with more than one thousand young people and examined the issues that they perceive as important in their lives. A specific project conducted in 2014/2015 involved visiting 21 churches in various parts of Australia to speak to young people, youth ministry leaders, church leaders and parents. The outcome of this research was the publication of *A Vision for effective Youth Ministry* in 2015, which provides key insights for church leaders and youth ministry leaders.

As a follow up to this research, the Melbourne Archdiocese commissioned the Christian Research Association to undertake a specific research project focussing on various aspects of youth ministry within Catholic parishes and youth groups operating in the Melbourne Archdiocese. The project involved two online surveys conducted between November 2016 and February 2017. Forty six young people from across the Archdiocese completed the first survey (the Youth Survey). It is likely that the survey under-represents young people who attend a youth group occasionally and over-represents those young people who are highly involved. The second survey focussed on the role of youth ministry leaders (the Leaders) to which 44 leaders responded.

This report provides a detailed analysis of the findings from both surveys.

The Youth Survey explored the involvement of young people in specific youth activities as well as their engagement with various aspects of faith and spiritual activities. The young people surveyed demonstrated an active involvement with their local parishes and expressed a strong faith, which shapes how they live and provides moral guidance for them in their daily activities. The majority of those surveyed affirmed a belief in a personal God and feel close to God. They see their faith as shaping their lives, giving them good values to live by and expect to retain their faith and continue parish involvement in the future. The overwhelming majority expressed a high level of enjoyment of Mass, Liturgy and prayer time. It is noted that regular attendance at Mass is strongly influenced by the frequency of church attendance by parents and other family members.

The young people surveyed stated that they felt accepted and supported by the older members of the parish. They were particularly positive about the influence of the youth leadership and felt that the leaders demonstrated an interest in their wellbeing and a passion for helping young people in their growth and development. Indeed the young people felt that their involvement in parish youth groups has had a significant impact in their lives, specifically their faith and relationships with others has been strengthened. Youth ministry was seen very positively by most young people who were involved.

The Youth Leaders survey revealed a group of leaders who have a passion for youth ministry and in particular for helping young people to develop a sense of worth, healthy relationships and a personal relationship with God. They felt there were pathways for young people to get involved in their local parish. While the youth leaders felt supported by the other members of their team, their parish priest and the Archdiocese, they felt less support from their local parishes. The main challenges considered by the leaders were getting consistent youth participation in activities and connecting with young people outside of the parish. They noted that the effectiveness of their ministry might benefit from additional leadership training, theological training and financial resources.

One of the great challenges in youth ministry is reaching out to youth in the wider community. There is only a little evidence here that that is happening broadly. Most of the young people involved had grown up in Mass-attending families, and the youth ministry was confirming their Catholic commitment and building their faith and their relationships with peers who shared similar values and commitments. Whilst we can not generalise too broadly about the survey results, according to the young people and leaders who responded, the youth ministries in the various parishes in the Archdiocese are doing well in building the faith of the young people who attend their activities.

Introduction

Between November 2016 and February 2017, young people connected with Catholic parishes and youth groups within the Melbourne Archdiocese were asked to complete an online survey about 'Young People and Parish Youth Activities' (called the “Youth survey” throughout this report). A parallel online survey was also conducted of youth ministry leaders (“Leaders survey”) during the same time period.

Youth survey

Respondents to the Youth survey came from various parishes and locations where youth ministry was occurring, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Location of respondents to the Youth survey

Ascot Vale	Dallas	Moorabbin
Avondale Heights	Dandenong	Murrumbeena
Blackburn	Deer Park	Narre Warren
Box Hill	Dingley	Northcote
Burwood	Essendon	Pakenham
Campbellfield (Chaldean)	Ferntree Gully	Ringwood
Caroline Springs	Hawthorn	Rosanna
Cathedral (Melbourne)	Hoppers Crossing	Sunshine
Caulfield North	Keysborough	Wantima South
Clarinda	Melton South	. . . Multiple locations
Collingwood	Mill Park	
Craigieburn	Monash University	

Overall, 46 young people undertook the Youth Survey, and

- 35 per cent were aged between 17 and 19 years,
- 38 per cent were aged 20 to 24 years,
- 15 per cent were aged 25 to 29 years, and,
- 12 per cent were in their early 30s.

Fifty-nine per cent of respondents to the Youth survey were females, and 41 per cent were males. A total of 62 per cent of the respondents were born in Australia. Almost all of those born overseas were born in an Asian country. Just over three-quarters (77%) of the respondents had one or both parents born overseas.

Most respondents (82%) were living with their parents. Twelve per cent were studying at school (all were in Catholic schools), 47 per cent were at university or TAFE and 30 per cent were employed full-time, part-time or casually.

Leaders survey

Respondents to the Leaders survey were from similarly diverse parish locations, as the following table shows.

Table 2. Location of respondents to the Leaders survey

Ascot Vale	Footscray	Mornington
Blackburn North	Frankston	Mulgrave
Box Hill	Glen Waverley	Ringwood
Burwood	Hawthorn	Rowville
Campbellfield (Chaldean)	Hoppers Crossing North	Springvale North
Caroline Springs	Keilor East	St Albans
Clayton	Melbourne	Syndal
Craigieburn	Mill Park	. . . Multiple locations
Deer Park	Mitcham	
Doveton	Monash University	

In the leaders survey, 44 people undertook the survey, and

- 9 per cent were aged under 20 years,
- 43 per cent were aged between 20 to 24 years,
- 15 per cent were aged 25 to 29 years,
- 21 per cent were aged 30 to 34 years, and,
- 12 per cent were aged 48 or older.

Fifty-six per cent of respondents to the Leaders survey were females, and 44 per cent were males. Seventy-one per cent of the leaders were born in Australia. Sixty-two per cent of the leaders had one or both parents born overseas.

While 46 per cent of leaders indicated they had completed a bachelor's degree as their highest level of education, 43 per cent had only completed secondary school. However, nearly all of these were the younger respondents, probably still completing their University studies. A further eleven per cent had completed a diploma or associate diploma.

Sixty-one per cent of the respondents were volunteer youth leaders, while a further seven per cent were volunteers as part of a youth leadership team. Fourteen per cent were in part-time paid youth leadership positions, and nine per cent were in such positions full-time.

Half of the leaders had been a youth leader for more than five years, 28 per cent had been a leader for between two and five years, nine per cent between one and two years, and 13 per cent less than one year.

The leaders were asked how they had come to be involved in youth leadership in their parish:

- 26 per cent said they were previously involved as a young person in the parish,
- nine per cent said they were involved in another church and invited to help with the parish,
- 12 per cent had submitted an application for the position and appointed,
- five per cent were parents of a young person involved in the parish,
- 33 per cent had been identified as a potential leader and encouraged to take on the role.

A further 16 per cent noted other pathways to involvement as leaders:

- *Asked priest if we could start a YG*
- *Been involved with youth ministry for more than 10 years in different countries*
- *I am involved in another parish, close to home where I was attending the Youth Group and I just put my hand up to help out with a few things and it ended up as being the youth leader*
- *I am the Parish Worker @ [xxxx] Parish and I was invited to join in on Youth Ministry activities*
- *I joined the Mission Action Youth Organisation at [xxxx College]*
- *I saw a need within the Archdiocese and gathered other women to start something*
- *School teacher whose group aim to link students back to parish*
- *Wanted to meet youth in the parish so started a new group*

For 30 per cent of respondents, their youth leadership role was their sole involvement in the parish. Others had numerous roles, including involvement in music or drama (40 per cent were involved), helping with Mass or other liturgies (40%), technical assistance (16%), helping with children's programs in the parish (14%), or with practical assistance in other ways (12%). Fourteen per cent of the respondents indicated they assisted with organising state-wide, diocesan or national youth events. Other involvements as part of their leadership roles included:

- *Actually belong to a different parish but connect through secondary school*
- *Help with parish events e.g. parish picnic*
- *I am a staff member in a Catholic organisation*
- *Parish Worker - Looking after the aged, sick and isolated members in our community*
- *pastoral associate*

Some notes about the surveys

Participants in the Youth survey and the Leaders survey were given the opportunity to win a \$100 gift card by completing the survey and providing their email address.

Because this was a voluntary activity that, in most cases, respondents did in their own time, it is likely that there are some biases in the results. It is likely that the survey under-represents young people who attend a youth group occasionally and over-represents those young people who are highly involved. It is likely that the responses represent those young people who enjoy reading and doing surveys and does not represent well the opinions of those who do not enjoy such activities, perhaps including young people who attend youth groups for the games and the fun rather than the study. **In reading through this report, those possible biases should always be kept in mind.**

An additional note about statistical significance used in this report

Statistical significance is usually reported at 0.05, 0.01 or 0.001 level, meaning that there is a less than five in one hundred chance, one in one hundred chance, or one in a thousand chance, respectively, that the result under discussion has arisen by chance. For example, a 0.003 level of statistical significance score means that there is less than three chances in one thousand that the observed difference has arisen by chance. In other words, the observed difference is highly likely to reflect a real difference in the wider population. As there were relatively low numbers of respondents, most differences between females and males were generally not statistically significant.

Section 1. Survey of Young People

Youth Ministry and Young People's Involvement

Young people were asked about their involvement in various activities, and whether their involvement had been through a Catholic parish, a non-Catholic church, at school or university, or in another context.

Table 3 below shows, not surprisingly, that most of the young people (82%) were involved in a youth group at a Catholic parish, while two-thirds were involved in a small discussion or study group. Positively, 60 per cent of the respondents were involved in intergenerational activities in a Catholic parish, perhaps demonstrating the inclusive parish communities of which they are a part. Just over one-third of the young people (36%) were involved with a music or drama group in a parish, while slightly fewer (31%) were involved in a mission activity.

Some respondents were involved in various activities at school or at university, particularly in a small group (24%), a social justice activity (18%), a sporting team (18%), or a youth group (18%). Some were also involved in activities in another context.

Table 3. Young people's involvement in various activities (Percentage of respondents involved in the activity in the past 12 months in the various contexts)

Activity	At a Catholic parish	At another church (not Catholic)	At school or university	In another context
A small group for discussion or study	67	2	24	16
A social justice or community welfare activity	29	2	18	24
A music or drama group	36	0	13	18
A sporting activity or team	20	2	18	29
A mission activity	31	2	16	9
A youth group	82	0	18	16
A small mentoring or support group	18	2	11	9
Intergenerational activities	60	4	9	11

Note: totals in some rows in the above table add to more than 100 per cent as respondents indicated that they were involved in the same types of activities in more than one location. It is also possible that the same group may fulfil several functions. A youth group might be a small group for discussion or study and do some social justice and service activities, for example.

Seventy per cent of the young people who responded to the survey had been attending youth activities for more than two years. Sixteen per cent had been attending for between one and two years, while five per cent had been attending for more than 3 months but less than one year. For three per cent of respondents it was their first time at a youth activity.

The survey asked the young people how they had become involved in the youth activities. Almost half of the respondents (49%) had been invited by a friend to attend, while 44 per cent had family involved in the parish. Respondents had other influences in their involvement, including one-third who said the youth leader had invited them to the activities. Twenty-one per cent said they had heard about it at school or at university, while a small percentage said they had first got involved

through other means, such as hearing about it because they lived nearby, or found it online.

As indicated in Table 4, below, just under half of the young people (47%) try never to miss youth activities when they are on, and a further 33 per cent mostly attend. Twelve per cent attend when they either have nothing else on, or when there is something that appeals to them (9%).

Table 4. Description of young peoples' attendance at youth activities (Percentage of respondents)

Response	Percent
I try never to miss: I do my best to attend every time it is on	47
I mostly attend when youth activities are on	33
I go to youth activities occasionally when I haven't got anything else on	12
I only go when there is a good activity on	9
My parent/s make me go, but I don't really enjoy it	0
I only go when my friends go	0
Other response	0

Different activities appeal to different young people, and respondents were asked to what extent they enjoyed the various activities, as listed in Table 5 below. All of the young people said they mostly enjoy or enjoy a lot mission trips, while nearly all enjoy camps or weekends away (96%), large gatherings of youth from wider areas (94%), activities away from the normal setting (93%), Mass or liturgies (91%), prayer times (91%) and intergenerational activities (89%).

Table 5. Young peoples' enjoyment of various youth group activities – Percentage of females and males who 'Mostly enjoy' or 'Enjoy a lot' (Sorted by highest proportion of respondents enjoying the activity)

Activity	Females	Males	All respondents
Mission trips (in Australia or overseas)	100	100	100
Camps, retreats or weekends away	100	92	96
Large gatherings of youth groups from all over Australia or the area	95	92	94
Activities away from the normal setting	88	100	93
Mass or other liturgies	89	93	91
Prayer times	100	79	91
Intergenerational activities	89	90	89
Discussion or small groups, Bible study	94	74	84
Active games where everyone gets involved	78	92	83
Connecting with young people from another, parish or youth group	88	73	82
Service activities in the community	86	67	77
Unstructured times to just relax with others	68	83	74

Note: there were no significant differences between the responses of females and males.

The Spirit of Young People

Building on the research that the Christian Research Association has undertaken on youth spirituality, we have measured the spirit of young people by looking at five relationships (see Hughes 2007):

- with the **self** - measured in terms of sense of purpose and positive attitudes to the self;
- with **close others** - measured in terms of supportive friendships and making a contribution at home;
- with **wider society** - measured in the determination to make the world a better place and having a sense that there is place for one in society;
- with the **natural environment** - measured in terms of concern and care for the environment; and,
- with **God**. (This fifth relationship is discussed in the next section.)

Figure 1.

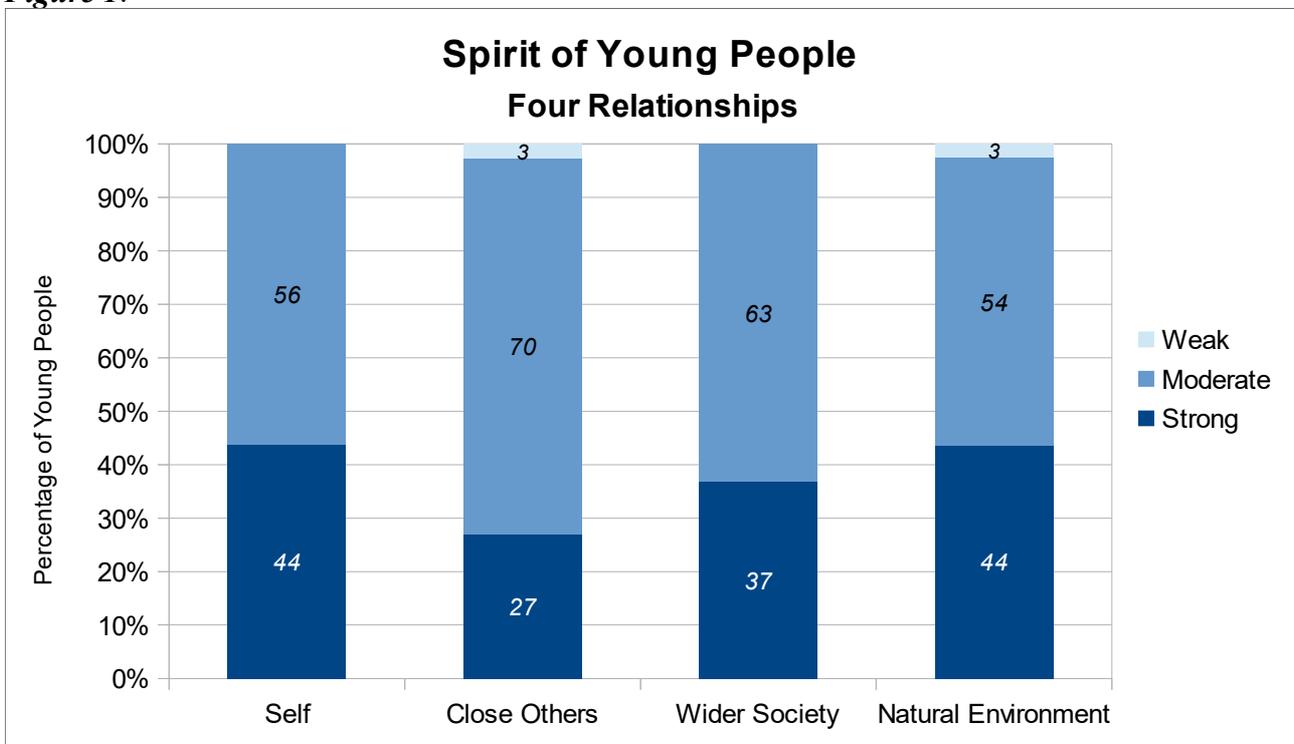


Figure 1 above shows 44 per cent of young people who responded to the survey had a strong relationship with themselves, with a strong sense of purpose and a positive attitude to themselves. The remaining respondents (56 per cent) had a moderate relationship, while no respondents had a weak relationship.

The other columns shows the results for the relationship with close others, the wider society and the natural environment. In these areas, between 27 per cent and 44 per cent had strong positive relationships with friends and family, positive attitudes to making the world a better place and caring about the environment. Between 54 per cent and 70 per cent had moderate relationships and only a few had weak or negative relationships.

Another set of questions asked young people about their levels of satisfaction in life, and the mean

scores on a scale of 1 to 10 are shown in Table 4. Other research has shown that the most important factor in overall satisfaction in life among young people is satisfaction with life at home. Other major factors which have a significant impact on the satisfaction with life as a whole include:

- satisfaction with friends,
- satisfaction with health and fitness,
- satisfaction in school or university studies, and
- satisfaction in one's spiritual life.

Table 6. Mean scores (scale 1 to 10) for satisfaction in life among young people, by gender

Satisfaction in Life	Females	Males	All respondents
Your school studies	7.3	6.6	7.0
Your friends	7.5	7.6	7.5
Your health and fitness	5.9	6.4	6.1
Your confidence in yourself	6.7	7.4	7.0
Your life at home	7.4	6.5	7.0
Your spiritual life	6.8	6.8	6.8
Your contribution to the lives of other people	6.5	6.3	6.4
How you look / body-image	6.2	6.0	6.1
Your care of the environment	6.7	6.9	6.7
Your relationship with God	6.6	7.3	6.9
Your work	7.2	6.5	6.9
Your sense of meaning in life	7.1	7.3	7.2
Your life as a whole	7.5	4.6	7.5

Overall, young people were moderately satisfied with life and with its various components. The Australian average of satisfaction with life as a whole is 7.2, and these young people scored slightly higher than the average. In fact, they were most satisfied with their life as a whole, with their friends (7.5) and their sense of meaning in life (7.2), and were least satisfied with their own self confidence and body image (both 7.0). While there were some small differences in satisfaction in life between females and males, none were significant. However, the comparatively low levels of confidence among the females in their health and fitness and their body image should be noted. Males were particularly low in their sense of satisfaction also in their body image, and in their contribution to the lives of others.

In research conducted in 21 youth ministry settings across several denominations, undertaken during 2014 and 2015, the Christian Research Association noted similar patterns in youth ministry and in the expression in faith (Hughes, Reid & Fraser, 2016). The insights drawn from the research noted that youth ministry needs to see a variety of expressions of faith arising from the variety of personalities of young people. These personalities were divided into four types which were named as:

1. the Nerd – highly cognitive, enjoy discussions, likes grappling with ideas;
2. the Drama Kid – enjoy and express faith through performance in music or drama, find meaning through special experiences;
3. the Practical Helper – enjoy helping others, enjoy practical expressions of faith;

4. 4. the Party Animal – value the social aspect of faith, enjoy being with people and are most happy in a group with others.

(For a detailed description of the personality types, see Chapter 2. in *A Vision for effective Youth Ministry: Insights from Australian Research.*)

A number of questions were asked in the survey to identify the types of young people who were involved in the Catholic youth ministry activities. The following is the result:

- percentage who scored highly on the Nerd scale: 88%;
- percentage who scored highly on the Drama Kid scale: 73%;
- percentage who scored highly on the Practical Helper scale: 93%; and
- percentage who scored highly on the Party Animal scale: 76%

Note that most people have different aspects to their personalities. Some score highly on two or three of these indicative personality preferences, while others score strongly on just one of the preferences. It is noteworthy that 'Practical helper' scored highest, as this was the one expression of faith which was least provided for in the *Vision for effective youth ministry* research visits to youth groups.

Respondents to the survey were asked to rate the overall feeling of youth ministry on a scale from -5 to +5. Most young people who completed the survey were very positive about the youth ministry at the parish or church in which they were involved.

- 10% scored their youth ministry as 0 or less.
- 39% scored it as 1, 2, or 3.
- 51% scored it 4 or 5.

Table 7. Personality type and overall feeling about Youth Ministry

Personality Type	Overall feeling about Youth Ministry on a scale of -5 to +5
Party Animal	3.7
Drama Kid	3.4
Nerd	3.2
Practical Helper	3.2
Overall	3.2

Note: the 'Overall' score was calculated using a One-sample T test, while the 'Personality type' scores were calculated using the Dependent means test. The personality scores were higher than overall as not all respondents answered all of the questions which the personality scales were based upon.

The importance of this part of the survey is to emphasise that different activities are needed for young people with different personalities and personal preferences. The survey showed that the strongest affirmation of youth ministry came from those who scored highest in being party animals. In contrast, those who were least positive about youth ministry were 'the practical helpers', which suggests that youth groups could do more for those who like to express themselves through practical helping or social justice type activities. This result was consistent with the *Vision for Effective Youth Ministry* findings which suggested that few youth groups gave expression to this aspect of faith.

There was a significant difference in the overall appreciation of the youth ministry between females and males, with male respondents scoring higher (3.6) than females (2.4). However, the survey found little difference between the various ages.

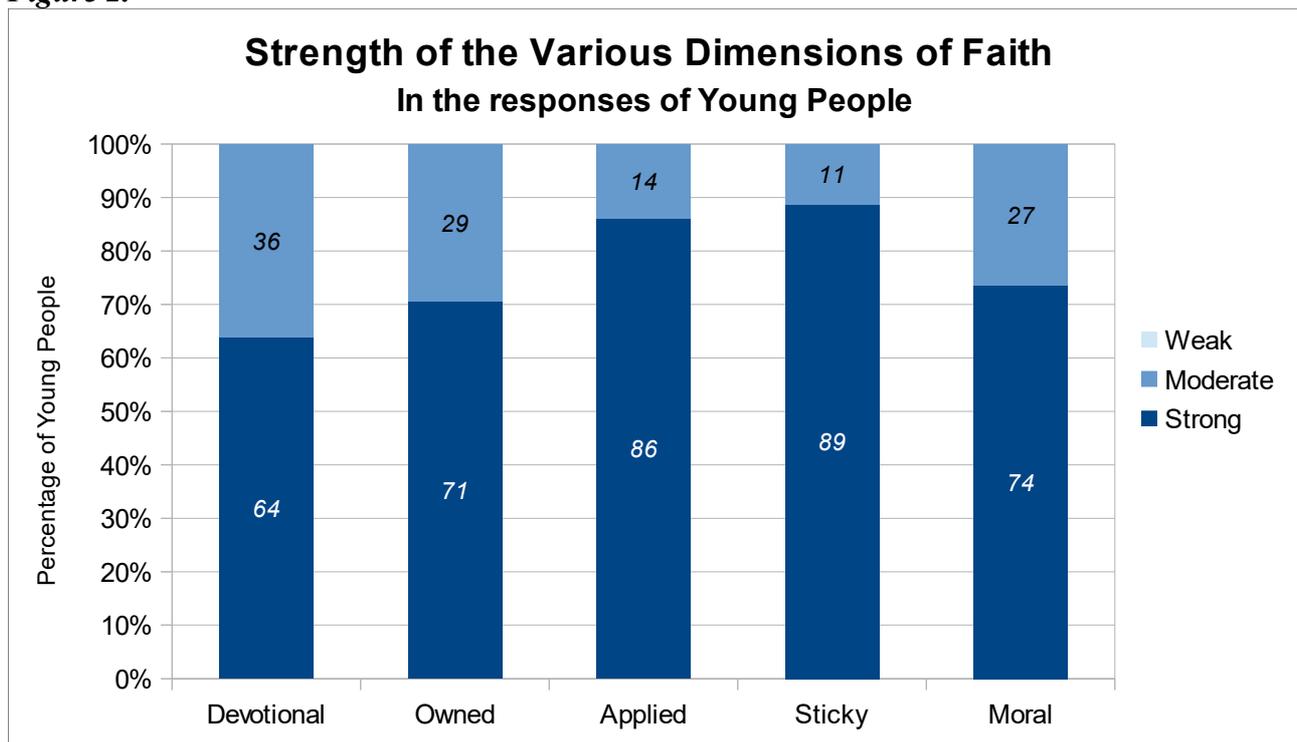
The Faith of Young People

In CRA's qualitative studies of youth ministry, five dimensions of faith were identified, which have been measured in this survey. These dimensions are the following:

- **devotional** faith - feeling close to God and sense of acceptance by God;
- **owned** faith - having a personal commitment to faith and sense of ownership of faith;
- **applied** faith - faith which helps to shape how the person lives and gives them principles for life;
- **sticky** faith - expectation that they will continue to be involved in the church and that faith helps them through the challenging times of life; and,
- **moral** faith - a faith that helps them to know what is right and wrong and gives priority in life to the needs of others.

We also looked at several other questions on the nature of faith. To what extent was the faith of young people uncritical or reflective? Was it a faith which does or does not question and accepts or questions authority. To what extent did young people indicate that nature was a place where they experienced the spiritual dimension of life? And did they believe in God?

Figure 2.



The responses to the questions on faith showed that most young people reported having a strong faith which they expected to maintain in the future (sticky), which shaped how they lived their life (applied), and which provided moral principles for life (moral). They were weakest in the extent to which they felt close to God (devotional) and committed to their faith (owned). However, in this regard, between 64 per cent and 71 per cent affirmed strongly having devotional or owned faith.

They were slightly divided in the extent to which they approached faith uncritically or reflectively.

- 50% indicated they approached faith largely reflectively;
- 42% were in the middle; and,
- 8% indicated that they approached faith uncritically, believing it was appropriate to accept it without question.

In relation to whether young people felt most spiritual in nature,

- 39% said this was generally or definitely true;
- 31% said this was true sometimes and sometimes it was not true; and,
- 31% said this was generally or definitely not true.

In general, in other surveys we have found about 40 per cent of young people nationally have affirmed the importance of nature as a context for their spirituality.

Young people were asked to consider what they personally believed about God. This question makes several distinctions. First of all, it distinguishes those who believe in God and those who believe in some sort of spirit or life-force, and those who reject any such belief. It also distinguishes between those who see God as involved in the lives of people today and those who see God as not involved in the world. It is also important to note that results from other surveys, particularly of students in Catholic schools, show there are others who simply do not know what to think about God.

Table 8. Young peoples' beliefs about God (Percentage of respondents)

Response	Percent
There is a God who is a personal being involved in the lives of people today	89
There is a God who created the world, but is NOT involved in the world now	6
There is some sort of spirit or life force	6
I don't really know what to think	0
I don't think there is any sort of spirit, God or life force	0

Overall, 89 per cent of the young people said they believed in a personal God involved in the lives of people today, while only a few (6%) said they believed in an impersonal God, and a few others (6%) who believed in some sort of spirit or life force.

Faith practices

It is frequently noted that church attendance is declining in Australia, as it is in most parts of the Western world. It is commonly said that this is part of a continuing process of secularisation in which religion is declining in importance. Indeed, such statements have been made frequently for more than a century, but the patterns of attendance have often not matched expectations.

What has occurred is not so simply a decline in religious attendance, but a change in attitude to faith. Rather than being something that is owned by the community of faith, such as a parish community, the Church is seen as 'owned' by the individual. There have been some suggestions in Europe that there has been some stemming of the decline and even, in some places, a reversal. In some places, it is evident that rather than people ceasing to attend altogether, they are going to church when it fits into their increasingly complex schedule of other activities.

Almost all of the young people surveyed (97%) had attended Mass at a parish at least once a week or more often in the past 12 months. Most of the young people had attended Mass at a parish regularly since primary school, but a small group who had attended just occasionally when they were younger were now attending more regularly.

Table 9. Frequency of Mass attendance (Percentage of respondents)

Frequency of church attendance	Percent
<i>In the final year of primary school . . .</i>	
Never	0
Occasionally	14
Two or three times a month	0
Once a week or more often	86
<i>In the past year . . .</i>	
Never	0
Occasionally	3
Two or three times a month	0
Once a week or more often	97

How do the young people who attend Mass feel about it? It is commonly said that young people find traditional church services boring and irrelevant. However, Table 10 below provides a more nuanced picture of the young peoples' attitudes toward worship or religious services. It shows that when they attend, they find services relevant to life (7.6 out of 10), it connects them to their Catholic tradition (7.3), helps them feel close to God (7.2), it is inspiring (7.1) and they feel welcomed (7.8). The young people surveyed do not generally feel uncomfortable at Mass, nor do they find it difficult to understand or boring.

However, the figures in Table 10 must be read in light of the figures in Table 9, which indicates that the survey respondents are highly engaged with their parish and attend Mass regularly, and as such, see Mass in a much more positive light than those who do not attend as regularly (many of whom did not respond to this survey).

Table 10. Mean scores (scale 1 to 10) of how young people describe their most recent experience of Mass, by gender

Experience	Females	Males	All respondents
Relevant to my life	7.6	7.4	7.6
Inspiring	7.2	6.9	7.1
Boring	3.7	4.6	4.1
Difficult to understand	3.6	3.4	3.5
Helped me feel close to God	6.9	7.6	7.2
Connected me to my Catholic tradition	6.8	7.9	7.3
Made me uncomfortable	2.1	2.5	2.2
Made me feel welcome	6.5	7.3	6.9
Challenged me in positive ways	5.7	6.6	6.1

Note: there were no statistically significant differences between the responses of females and males.

Very often young people's attendance at Mass is influenced by those with whom they have strong relationships, such as family or close friends. The following table shows the extent to which family and friends attended Mass regularly. The high frequency of church attendance by the parents of the young people does provide a context for the high levels of involvement by the young people themselves, as indicated in Table 9.

Table 11. Family and friends attendance at Mass (each row adds to 100%)

Attendance at church services	Never or Occasionally	Monthly or more often	Weekly or more often	Don't know
Mother	6	6	86	3
Father	22	3	75	0
Closest friend	36	8	50	6

Note: there were no significant differences between the responses of females and males.

A further question was asked of the young people about how they would describe themselves in relation to faith. Their responses are shown in Table 12.

Table 12. Young peoples' self-description of the Catholic or Christian faith (Percentage of respondents)

Response	Percent
Not really interested in the Catholic faith	0
I am interested, but I would not describe myself as a Catholic or Christian	6
I am not sure what to think about the Catholic or Christian faith	0
I consider myself a Catholic or Christian	92
Other	3

Ninety-two per cent of the young people considered themselves Catholic or Christian, while six per cent said they were interested, but wouldn't describe themselves as such. Three per cent described themselves as 'Other', but did not go into further detail.

It is important to note that all of the respondents had at least two key people – most often a mother and a father – who had influenced them in their faith, with an average of just over four key 'influencers' overall. This aligns with findings from other research by the Christian Research Association into students at Anglican and Catholic schools, which found that a student's family was the strongest influencer on faith and values. The research also found that if families, the church and schools collaborated in influencing a young person's faith then that influence will be maximised (Hughes, 2016).

It is also important to note the strong influence which Youth Leaders had had on these young people, which suggests promising opportunities for leaders to nurture the faith and values of the young people they connect with.

Table 13. The key people who had influenced the young peoples' faith (Percentage of respondents)

Key person	Percentage of respondents
Mum	88
Dad	66
Grandparent	38
Sibling	16
Friend	50
Priest, Pastor or Minister	53
Youth leader	66
Mentor	31
Church member	28
Other	3

Note: the total in the above table adds to more than 100 per cent as respondents could choose all that applied.

Apart from the public practices of parish involvement, private practices are an important part of religious faith. The extent of private practice can be a better indicator of the vitality of personal faith than public practices, which often for young people are more influenced by whether other family members and friends are involved (see Table 11 above), and by the competition from other family and communal activities. Table 14 shows the extent to which the young people had engaged in the various faith practices over the previous month, aside from what they had done at youth group or at Mass. It shows that most young people are praying at least a few times per week, and many practice a quiet time with God, pray with their family, and talk with others about their faith.

The only significant difference between females and males in their private faith practices was in the frequency of participation in the Sacrament of Confession, with males participating more frequently than females.

Table 14. Percentage of young people who had engaged in various Christian practices in the previous month, apart from at youth group or church (each row adds to 100%)

Practice	Never	Once or twice	A few times a week	Every day	Not sure what it means
Read the Bible by myself	20	51	14	14	0
Read books on Christian themes	22	50	22	3	3
Prayed by myself	0	14	28	58	0
Practised a quiet time with God	3	29	43	20	6
Prayed with my friends	19	58	14	8	0
Prayed with my family	28	17	31	25	0
Talked with other people about my faith	3	43	41	14	0
Done things to help others because of my faith	14	38	45	3	0
Participated in the Sacrament of Confession	31	58	11	0	0

Understanding of the Bible

A number of items asked young people their attitudes to the Bible. Notwithstanding the fact that the young people surveyed only read their Bible once or twice a month, 45 per cent of them saw the Bible as central to their faith and life, and a similar proportion said it was sometimes true and sometimes not. One third found it hard to apply the Bible to everyday life and 39 per cent said that it was sometimes and sometimes not. However, while many found it hard to apply, nine out of ten young people felt that God spoke to them through the Bible at least sometimes.

Only a few of them took the Bible literally, although 70 per cent said that the miracles in the Bible really happened. Around three-quarters of the young people thought the Bible should, at least sometimes, take into account the situation and the society in which it is being read.

Forty-two per cent said they did not have time to read the Bible regularly and another 36 per cent said it was *sometimes* difficult to find the time.

Table 15. Attitudes of young people to the Bible – percentage of respondents (each row adds to 100%)

Statement	Not true at all / Generally not true	Sometimes true, sometimes not	Generally true / Definitely true
The Bible is central to my faith and life	11	44	45
I struggle with how to apply the Bible to my everyday life	28	39	33
God speaks to me through the Bible	9	51	40
The Bible is largely irrelevant to my life	77	14	9
The Bible is really just a collection of random stories	97	0	3
The Bible should be understood literally	79	12	9
The Bible should take into account the situation and the society in which it is being read	26	23	51
The Bible is difficult to understand	25	44	31
I find I don't have time to read the Bible regularly	22	36	42
All the miracles in the Bible really happened	10	20	70
I believe God created the earth in six literal days	69	17	14

Note: there were no significant differences between the responses of females and males.

Wider parish connection and involvement

According to research in the US, one of the issues in young people maintaining connections with the church beyond youth group is that they have strong relationships with other people in the church apart from the youth themselves, and feel that the older church members are supportive and accepting of the young people.

The following table shows that 78 per cent felt that the people in the parish were accepting and supportive of them. Encouragingly, almost two-thirds of the young people (65%) said it was generally or definitely true that they had good relationships with older adults in the parish, and just under half (46%) said they attended parish activities that included adults, most commonly in technical ways but also helping with music or drama.

Table 16. Attitudes of young people to various statements about youth ministry – percentage of respondents (each row adds to 100%)

Statement about youth ministry	Not true at all / Generally not true	Sometimes true, sometimes not	Generally true / Definitely true
People in the parish are very accepting and supportive of the youth	3	19	78
The parish priest is involved with the youth group	17	11	71
I know many older adults in the parish, and have a good relationship with many of them	10	26	65
If I stopped attending nobody would notice	61	25	14
I attend parish activities that include adults (e.g. small groups, music groups, social justice groups)	23	31	46

Note: there were no significant differences between the responses of females and males.

The young people were additionally asked about their involvement in the wider parish outside of their involvement in the youth activities. The table on the following page shows the extent of their involvement. It indicates that many young people are involved in the wider parish, with over one-third of them (37%) helping in technical ways, 22 per cent assisting with music or drama, and 19 per cent helping with children's programs. Forty-one per cent said they did not have any involvement in the wider parish outside of youth activities.

It is interesting to note that there are many young people who are involved across more than one parish, particularly in music and drama. It may be that they do not have the opportunities within the their own parish, so seek opportunities elsewhere. Or it may be that their expertise is shared across different parishes who require the young person's skills.

Table 17. Young people's involvement in the wider parish (Percentage of respondents)

Type of involvement in the parish	In this parish (%)	In another parish (%)
<i>Not involved in church other than in youth group or youth ministry</i>	41	45
Music or drama - play in a band, sing, act or help with music or drama at youth group or Mass, etc.	22	59
Technical - help with audio-visual, lighting or other technical aspects of youth group or Mass, etc.	37	17
Mass or other liturgies – reader, Eucharistic minister, help organise or lead, etc.	11	24
Practical helping - help serve morning-tea, set-up or tidy-up church, etc.	11	17
Helping with children's programs or liturgies	19	24
Other . . . <i>Liturgy Captain at school</i> <i>Partnership Parish Council</i> <i>Bulletins Manager</i> <i>Alter serve</i> <i>Help out in a mission movement/community reaching out to 'un-churched'</i>	14	

Note: the totals in the above table adds to more than 100 per cent as respondents could choose all that applied.

Youth leadership

The youth were very positive about the youth leaders. The large majority of youth said that the leaders took their safety and well-being seriously, they were passionate about helping young people, they took their questions seriously, they were genuine in their interest and care, and they could relate to them well.

The two areas in which the responses were not quite as strong were whether the youth leaders were well-organised or not, and whether the youth leaders encouraged them to think much about the wider community and society.

Table 18. Attitudes of young people to the youth ministry leaders or leadership team – percentage of respondents (each row adds to 100%)

Statement about youth leadership	Not true at all / Generally not true	Sometimes true, sometimes not	Generally true / Definitely true
I can relate well to them	0	16	84
They are caring and take a genuine interest in me	5	8	87
They are well-organised	8	16	76
They are passionate about helping young people like me	3	6	91
They have a strong Catholic faith	3	14	83
They are good role models for me	3	14	83
The leaders at this youth group take my questions about life and faith seriously	0	11	89
They encourage me to think about the wider community and society	3	22	75
They are fun to be with	0	17	83
The leaders at this youth group take my safety and well-being seriously	0	6	94

Note: there were no significant differences between the responses of females and males.

Archdiocesan Office for Youth Events

A set of questions was asked about whether the young people had attended an Archdiocesan Office for Youth (AOY) event, their appreciation of them, and whether they plan to attend future events.

Overall, 80 per cent of the respondents had attended an AOY event in the previous two years. They especially appreciated meeting new people, the Masses and other liturgies and catching up with friends. They appreciated least the study groups.

Table 19. What young people appreciated most about the most recent AOY attended (Percentage of respondents)

Aspect of event	Percentage of respondents
Meeting new people	81
Catching up with friends	69
Learning more about faith in Jesus	63
Mass and other liturgies	72
Study groups	13
Workshops and seminars	63
Other . . . <i>Guest speakers and Christian music</i>	3

Note: the total in the above table adds to more than 100 per cent as respondents could choose all that applied.

Eighty per cent of the respondents are planning to attend an AOY event in the next year, while the remaining 20 per cent said they were unsure.

Table 20 provide some of the reasons young people indicated they would attend future AOY events.

Table 20. Reasons young people want to attend an AOY event (Percentage of respondents)

Reason	Percentage of respondents
I just want to be there	56
I want to catch up with friends	56
I hope to learn more	91
I am attending as a leader	13
Some other reason . . . <i>Love of the Lord</i> <i>Meet other young Catholics</i>	6

Note: the total in the above table adds to more than 100 per cent as respondents could choose all that applied.

Promoting events

A question was asked about the use of social media. Facebook and text messaging were most widely used.

Table 21. Young people's use of social media (Percentage of respondents)

Type of app used	Percentage of respondents
<i>I do not use any social media</i>	3
Facebook	91
Twitter	12
Instagram	35
Snapchat	41
Text messaging	82
Instant messaging	38
Other app . . . <i>Linkedin</i> <i>Tumblr</i> <i>Viber</i>	9

Note: the total in the above table adds to more than 100 per cent as respondents could choose all that applied.

The most popular way of promoting events or activities was through social media, according to these young people. Secondly, promotion should occur through email. However, it is noteworthy that on average young people suggested three methods of promoting events, suggesting that promotion should occur via multiple channels.

Table 22. Young people's opinions on the best way youth ministry groups should promote their events – Percentage of respondents

Method	Percent
Facebook, Twitter or other social media	97
Text or instant messaging	53
Website	38
Postcards or posters to the parish or youth group	27
Postcards or posters directly to you	15
Email	62
Other method . . . <i>Word of mouth, presence at Mass</i> <i>In person</i>	6

Impact of youth ministry and church

The survey asked young people about the impact of youth ministry and the parish on their lives. The areas covered reflect the two aspects of spiritual life that were discussed earlier in the report. One aspect covered the various relationships which contribute to the spirit of young people: their relationships with themselves, close others, the wider society and the natural environment. The other aspect covered the dimensions of Christian faith: devotional faith, an owned faith, applied faith, a sticky faith and a moral faith.

It should be noted that we have not measured directly the impact of youth ministry and the parish on these young people. Rather, we have asked them to assess whether the youth ministry has been helpful in these ways. The results are summarised in the following two graphs.

Figure 3.

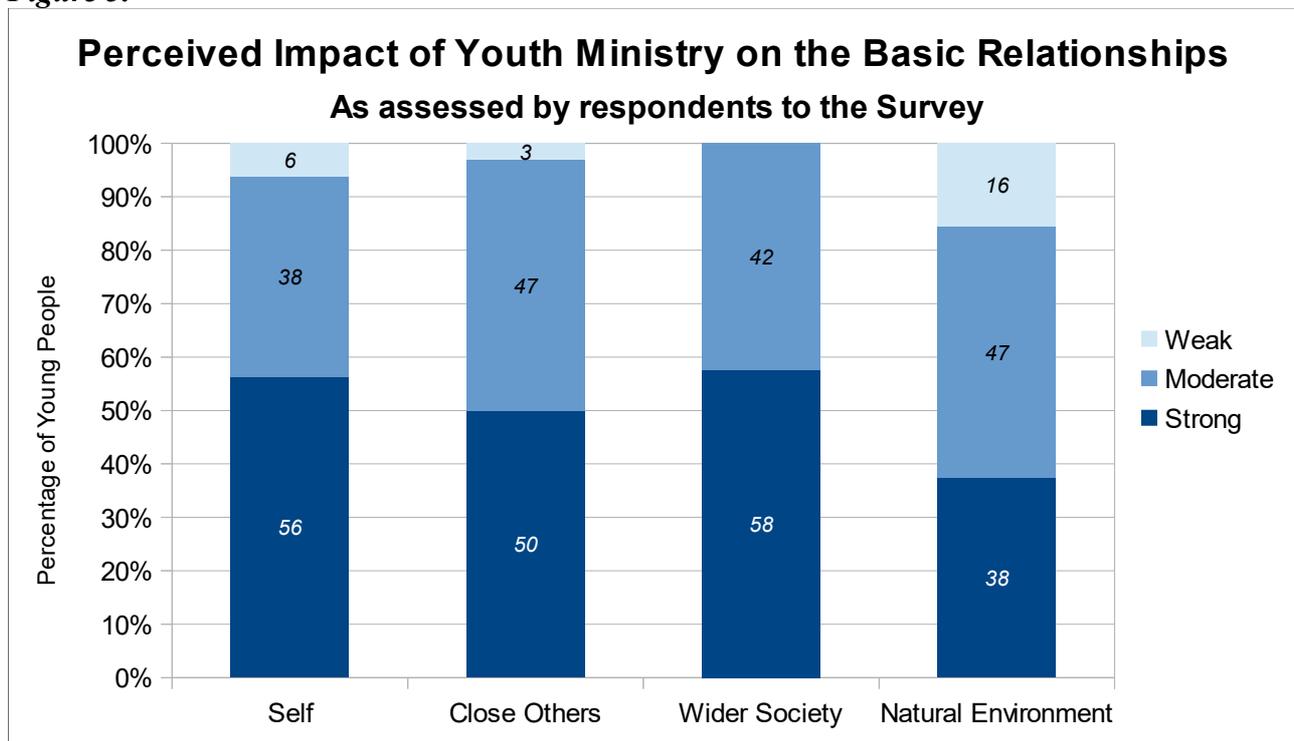
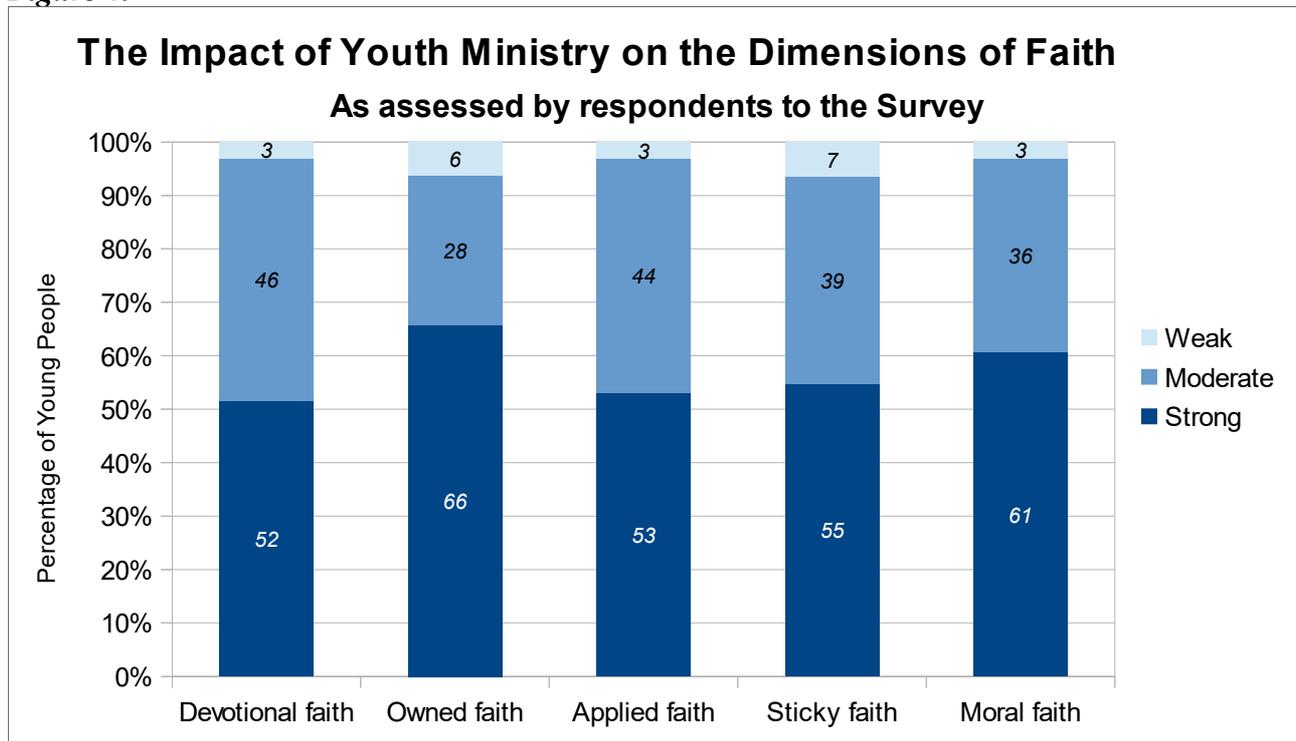


Figure 3 shows that young people saw the youth ministry and parish as strongly encouraging the deepening of their relationship with wider society (58 per cent of young people affirmed that it had a strong influence), and in their relationship with self (56 per cent said it had a strong influence). The impact of youth ministry was also strongly encouraging in the relationships with close others, such as friends and family, with half of the young people indicating it had influenced them strongly in these areas. However, the impact of youth ministry was not as strongly affirmed with the natural environment.

The affirmation of the impact of youth ministry was particularly strong in relation to dimensions of the Catholic faith, as shown in Figure 4 below. Two-thirds of young people saw the youth ministry in their parishes as strongly encouraging an owned faith in which they committed themselves to follow Jesus. Similarly they saw the youth ministry as strongly encouraging a moral faith which sought to think through the big questions of life and to help them to develop strong principles which guided their life.

However, there was a small proportion of young people for whom the impact of youth ministry and the parish had encouraged them little or not at all.

Figure 4.



In summary, however, overall these young people were very positive about the youth ministry in their parishes. A large majority of young people saw their youth ministry as strongly encouraging a close relationship with God which shaped their lives and their values, presently and in the future, as well as developing strong relationships with friends and family,

Some further comments from young people were made about their group or youth ministry:

- *Feeling lack of current member support/youth group leader volunteers to help out in the events, so if things don't go right, everyone stumble. Insufficient funding Almost every time, the same people attended Youth Mass and Activities.*
- *I love my youth group. It inspires me every time I attend*
- *iStand and the Youth Mission Team, along with the DoJ Community provide a very good example of faith to young people, and St Benedict's is a very active parish because of the DoJs.*
- *Our youth group is young and quite new to Melbourne. It is a movement which started in the Philippines. The mission is to the 'unchurched'. Activities are grounded on the Catholic faith with some twist to relate and encounter other youth who do not consider themselves as 'religious'.*
- *The leaders need more formation or need to know where and when they can get formation. Also they need retreats.*
- *They are an incredible group of young people who are passionate about Christ, and have fun activities outside the faith environment which allows me to create and maintain new friendships.*

Section 2. Survey of Youth Ministry Leaders

Youth ministry activities

The respondents to the Leaders Survey were asked the sorts of activities they had in their parish or as part of their youth ministry, and how often the activities occurred. The below table shows the results.

Table 23. Types of youth activities occurring in the leader's parish or youth ministry – percentage of respondents (each row adds to 100%)

Activity	Not at all	Occasionally or In blocks	At least monthly	Fort-nightly	Weekly
A small group for discussion or study	5	28	21	16	30
A social justice or community welfare activity	23	59	9	2	7
A music or drama group	26	33	12	9	21
A community welfare group	48	24	7	2	19
A sporting activity or team	43	48	5	2	2
A mission activity	47	51	2	0	0
A youth group	10	2	29	24	34
A small mentoring or support group	56	12	16	5	12
Intergenerational activities	23	52	23	0	2
A camp, retreat or organised pilgrimage	14	84	2	0	0

Extra comments from the respondents noted other events or activities which were occurring and included:

- *A lot of ideas are placed in-store, however we are trying to form a good leadership team and then the youth group.*
- *All-nighter event*
- *Catholic Spiritual Revival Nights - large scale praise and worship, drama and sermon.*
- *Mass singing*
- *Parish family days*
- *Shared meals fun games nights*
- *Sunday Night Youth Choir approx once a month*
- *The group is a youth movement which has several groups across Melbourne, which primarily is local review groups but also has involvement on a larger scale, such as through camps or retreats, Action is a central focus of the group however this does not happen at every meeting.*
- *We run an event called Dinner & Dialogue twice a year where we get an incredible speaker to come and talk to people of all ages about a range of different topics.*
- *YEP has 2 x social trips a year*
- *Youth led Mass once a month with the youth group members hosting tea and coffee for parishioners.*
- *Youth Mass*
- *Youth mass once a month - youth are readers, commentator, special ministers, etc*

Leadership

The *Vision for Effective Youth Ministry* research summarised the qualities and skills needed within a youth ministry team to create an effective youth ministry (Hughes, Reid & Fraser, 2016, pp. 19-25). In the survey, the leaders were asked the extent to which the various youth ministry skills were met in their youth leadership team.

Almost all of the respondents (97%) felt that most of their youth ministry team had a passion for helping young people. More than three-quarters of respondents indicated that their team generally or definitely had the skills for communicating with young people (79%), had a strong Catholic faith (76%), had the required organisational skills (76%) and understood and could meet the needs of youth (76%). Respondents were least satisfied with the ways of encouraging youth involvement in social justice activities (just 41 per cent felt the needs were met), appropriate levels of training (45%), and effective communication with parents (47%).

Table 24. Satisfaction of youth leaders to the youth ministry needs being met in the leadership team – percentage of respondents (each row adds to 100%)

Area of youth ministry	Not met at all / Generally not met	Sometimes met, sometimes not	Generally met / Definitely met
Organisational skills	0	24	76
Vision for mission of youth ministry	9	38	53
Strong Catholic faith	0	24	76
Passion for helping youth	0	3	97
Appropriate level of training	9	46	45
Skills in communicating with young people	3	18	79
Understand and meet the needs of youth	3	21	76
Awareness of when the reporting of young people's situation is necessary	0	29	71
Ways of encouraging young people to get involved in social justice or community activities	21	38	41
Effective means to communicate with parents	16	37	47
Adequately resourced to share the Gospel with others in your community	9	35	56

Note: there was a significant statistical difference between females and males in the responses to the resources for sharing the Gospel, with two thirds of females indicating that area of youth ministry had been met to some extent, in comparison with 43 per cent of males.

Resourcing for leadership

In responding to the needs of youth ministry leaders, respondents were asked what sort of resources they would find useful and the extent to which they needed them. Theological training, financial resources and leadership training resources were considered the most urgent. In general, high proportions of respondents felt, whilst perhaps not urgent, it would be good to have most of the resources listed.

Table 25. Extent to which extra youth ministry resources are needed – percentage of respondents (each row adds to 100%)

Youth ministry resource	Don't need at present	Would be good to have more of	Definitely need more right now
Written youth ministry resources	33	50	17
Electronic resources, such as DVDs	36	42	21
Ideas for activities	18	44	38
Bible study, small group discussion or catechetical resources	24	42	33
Financial resources	27	29	44
Mentoring support for young people	3	67	30
Mentoring support for leaders	9	53	38
Theological training	6	50	44
Training in caring for young people	24	47	29
Leadership training resources	18	39	42

Other areas of training and resourcing leaders indicated would be most helpful in their roles included:

- *Fabulous to have a dedicated person for youth*
- *Getting information on topics that we might have in mind*
- *Legalities*
- *Marketing - ways to advertise and effectively promote youth groups*
- *Support from the AOY in promoting events at our parish.*
- *To have youth leaders adequately trained in apologetics, but also to have the compassion to understand when this knowledge is helpful and when it is not. For youth leaders to have a deep, personal and holistic relationship with Christ.*
- *Training for Parish Priests and Parishioners about the needs of Youth Ministry*
- *Training in working as a leadership team (dealing with conflict and delegating roles), relational ministry/reaching out to new members/leaders and evangelisation/catechetics.*

Ministry goals

Respondents to the survey were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 to 10, how important they considered various aims for their youth ministry. The following table shows the mean scores for each aim, and compares females to males. In general, most respondents rated the aims for their youth ministry very highly. The results show the importance the leaders place on helping young people to develop a sense of worth, healthy relationships and in particular a relationship with God.

The one goal which rated slightly lower than all others was the encouragement for young people to care for the environment, with respondents rating it 7.1 out of ten on average.

Table 26. Mean scores (scale 1 to 10) of how important Youth Leaders considered various ministry goals, by gender

Ministry goal	Females	Males	All respondents
To allow young people to socialise in a safe Christian environment	9.2	9.2	9.2
To encourage young people to develop a relationship with God	9.5	9.0	9.3
To allow young people to explore the Catholic faith	9.4	8.7	9.1
To assist young people to deal with the ups and downs of life	8.6	9.0	8.8
To encourage young people to get involved with their local church or parish	8.4	8.6	8.5
To help young people to share their faith with their friends	8.9	8.3	8.6
To encourage young people to help make the world a better place	9.3	8.9	9.2
To teach young people about the teachings and traditions of the Catholic faith	9.0	8.5	8.8
To encourage young people to own the faith for themselves	9.4	8.6	9.1
To encourage young people to attend church regularly	9.1	8.5	8.8
To help young people to believe they are people of worth	9.4	9.4	9.4
To encourage young people to develop strong friendships	9.7	9.1	9.4
To encourage young people to think about the needs of others	9.2	8.8	9.0
To encourage young people to care for the environment	7.0	7.3	7.1
To help young people feel close to God	9.6	9.0	9.4

Note: there was a statistically significant difference between the responses of females and males to the goal of 'encouraging the development of strong friendships'.

Support and connection

In discussing the landscape of Australian Catholic Youth Ministry, Hart notes the importance of support for youth ministry leaders from the different levels of the Church (Hart, 2014, p. 21).

Respondents were asked how much support they felt they received from the various people or groups. Nearly all of the respondents (97%) felt they received a fair bit or a great deal of support for their role from other leaders in their team. Many (72%) felt a fair bit or a great deal of support from the parish priest. Respondents felt the least support from local parishioners, with well over half indicating no support at all (3%) or very little support (53%) for their role.

Table 27. Level of support for Youth Leadership role – percentage of respondents (each row adds to 100%)

Group of people	No support at all	Only a little support	A fair bit of support	A great deal of support
The parents of the young people	13	23	48	16
The parish priest/s	3	24	30	42
The church or parish leadership team	6	38	31	25
Members of my local parish community	3	53	34	9
Denominational / diocesan / regional youth co-ordinators / directors	7	23	42	29
Other youth leaders on the team	0	3	18	79

The respondents were also asked to estimate the backgrounds of the young people, and how many have an on-going connection with the youth ministry.

Overall, the youth leaders estimated that 59 per cent of the young people in their youth ministry programs came from mainly parish backgrounds; for example, they had grown up in the parish or had been involved with the parish for some time. A further 19 per cent connected because they were friends with those from mainly parish backgrounds. The leaders further suggested that around 12 per cent of the young people in their youth ministry program had no previous parish connection prior to attending the group. They were unsure about the background of the remaining ten per cent.

Whilst the figures provided by the leaders are only rough estimates, they do provide some basis for understanding the pathways young people come into a youth ministry program or activity.

Local parish involvement in youth ministry

Youth Leader respondents were asked the extent to which they felt their local parish were involved in youth ministry. Anecdotal evidence suggests that parishes which value, support and embrace young people in their midst have greater involvement of young people in the life of the parish.

Sixty-one per cent said it was true to some extent that the parish provided pathways for the involvement of young people in the life of the parish community. Just over half of the respondents (53%) felt that most people in their parish valued youth ministry, 52 per cent indicated their parish had a youth ministry representative on the leadership team, and half said that older parishioners were genuinely interested in the young people.

Just under half of the respondents indicated their parish ran a separate youth worship service, perhaps regularly, while 39 per cent said their parish did not or only very occasionally.

Respondents indicated least the ongoing mentoring of young people by parishioners, with around one in five (21%) stating it true to some extent.

Table 28 below provides further detail.

Table 28. Parish's involvement in youth ministry – percentage of respondents (each row adds to 100%)

Statement	No, not really / A little	Sometimes true, sometimes not	Generally true / Yes, very much
The parish is financially committed to youth ministry in its budget	33	24	42
The value of youth ministry is recognised by most people in the parish	19	28	53
Church members or parishioners invest in youth ministry with their time and practical support	34	28	38
There is ongoing mentoring of young people by members of the parish	59	21	21
There is a youth ministry representative on the parish leadership team	31	17	52
There are intergenerational activities in the parish in which young people are regularly involved	46	18	36
Older people in the parish share a genuine interest in the young people	32	18	50
There is a separate youth worship service, Mass or liturgy	39	12	49
Church members or parishioners intentionally pray for young people and the youth ministry	30	40	30
There are pathways for young people to get involved with their local parish community	21	18	61
Church members or parishioners know the purpose of youth ministry in the parish	23	37	40

Promoting events

A question was asked of the youth leader respondents what they considered the best way to communicate with young people about youth ministry events.

Table 29. Best way to tell young people about youth ministry events (Percentage of respondents)

Communication method	Percentage of respondents
Facebook, Twitter or other social media	89
Text or instant messaging	57
Website	23
Postcards or posters for the church or parish	31
Postcards or posters handed to young people	43
Email	29
Other method . . .	14
<i>Flyers</i>	
<i>Personal contact and 'Live phone calls'</i>	
<i>Word of mouth, friends</i>	
<i>Newsletters</i>	
<i>Phone calls</i>	
<i>Word of mouth, personal invitation</i>	

Note: the total in the above table adds to more than 100 per cent as respondents could choose all that applied.

Similarly to the responses of the young people, social media and text or instant messaging were considered the best method for communicating youth ministry events or activities. Again, consistent with the responses of the young people surveyed, an average of three methods of promoting events was suggested by the leaders.

The respondents were also asked how the youth directors in the diocese, state or at national level could best contact them about wider youth ministry events.

Table 30. Best way for diocesan, state or national youth directors to communicate with youth ministry leaders about events (Percentage of respondents)

Communication method	Percentage of respondents
Facebook, Twitter or other social media	80
Text or instant messaging	37
Website	23
Postcards, posters or other printed material	23
Email	89
Other method	0

Note: the total in the above table adds to more than 100 per cent as respondents could choose all that applied.

The vast majority of respondents indicated the best way for youth directors to let them know about events was via email (89) or social media (80%). Most of the respondents indicated multiple methods of communication.

Issues and challenges in youth ministry

There are different facets in the dynamics of youth ministry, so youth leader respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 (where '1' was 'Really poorly' and '10' was 'Extremely well') how well they felt their youth ministry was going in the various aspects.

Overall, respondents considered their youth ministry was performing best in providing a safe social environment for young people, rating that aspect 8.8 out of 10. Other aspects which were rated moderately well included developing a strong sense of community (7.7), growing faith of young people (7.3), and forming young people to openly share their faith (6.9). Connecting young people with other youth outside their local parish (5.3) and with the wider society (5.6), and engaging them with their local parish (5.8) rated least of all.

Table 31. Mean scores (scale 1 to 10) of how well Youth Leaders considered they were going in the various areas of youth ministry, by gender

Area of ministry	Females	Males	All respondents
Growing the faith of young people	7.2	7.3	7.3
Developing a strong sense of community among the young people	7.5	7.9	7.7
Engaging young people in the life of their local parish	6.0	5.6	5.8
Connecting young people with the wider parish community (i.e. outside of their local parish)	5.6	4.9	5.3
Connecting young people with the wider society	5.9	5.2	5.6
Forming young people who can share their faith openly	6.8	7.0	6.9
Providing a safe environment for young people to socialise	8.6	9.0	8.8
Providing a community service for young people in the neighbourhood	6.1	5.6	5.9

Note: there were no significant differences between the responses of females and males.

Similarly, there are many challenges faced by those in youth ministry leadership, so respondents were asked the extent to which they had found various issues challenging. Again they were asked to rate each issue on a scale of 1 to 10, where '1' was considered 'Not an issue' and '10' was considered a 'Huge challenge'.

Only a few respondents found some of the issues a huge challenge, while many respondents found most of the issues only somewhat or moderately challenging. Overall, getting consistent youth participation (6.1 out of 10) and connecting with young people outside of the parish (6.1) were considered the most challenging areas of youth ministry by leaders. Behaviour problems (2.9) and finding suitable environments for activities (3.1) were the least challenging areas for leaders.

Table 32. Mean scores (scale 1 to 10) of how challenging various issues had been in the youth leaders' ministry, by gender

Area of ministry	Females	Males	All respondents
Getting consistent participation by young people	6.5	5.5	6.1
Finding leaders to assist in the youth ministry	5.2	4.9	5.1
Making connections with young people from families who are not involved with the parish	6.4	5.7	6.1
Behaviour of young people when they come to youth activities	2.8	3.0	2.9
Working out the program of activities	3.6	3.6	3.6
Getting the support of parents	5.5	3.4	4.6
Developing a common vision among the leaders	4.4	3.6	4.0
Finding suitable environments for youth activities	3.1	3.2	3.1
Getting young people to take the teaching and devotional content seriously	3.5	3.7	3.6
Maintaining the morale of the youth leadership team	4.4	3.9	4.2
Maintaining the administrative accountabilities	4.5	4.8	4.6
Getting support from your local parish	5.8	4.6	5.3
Getting support from diocesan, state and national levels of your denomination	4.4	3.7	4.1

Note: there was a significant statistical difference between females and males in the responses to 'Getting the support of parents'.

Respondents were also asked if there had been any other issues or challenges, apart from those listed in the table above:

- *As a volunteer, time is an issue - all of the questions about our youth ministry in this survey are things that we would like to do better but as volunteers time is an issue.*
- *Communication with young people and the struggle of finding a balance when communication is not occurring*
- *Getting Parishes to realise the Youth are not feeling connected to the structures of the Parishes. Hence it is hard to avoid operating in independence.*
- *Not enough time, with school and work, to invest into the running of retreats*
- *Time constraint of dedicated leaders*

The respondents were additionally asked to rate their overall feeling of youth ministry in their parish on a scale from -5 to +5. Most of the leaders who completed the survey were quite positive about the youth ministry at the parish or church in which they were involved.

- 5 % scored their youth ministry as 0 or less.
- 51% scored it as 1, 2, or 3.
- 44% scored it 4 or 5.

Table 33. Overall feeling about Youth Ministry in the Youth Leader's parish, by gender

Gender	Overall feeling about Youth Ministry on a scale of -5 to +5
Female	3.4
Male	2.9
Overall	3.2

Some final comments from the youth leaders were made about their group or their youth ministry:

- *A positive one, we feel greatly supported by the work of the AOY and hope to continue to stay in contact and participate in the programs the AOY offers.*
- *Being based in the city, we do have a very transient parish congregation that comes and goes, consisting of tourists (overseas and interstate) and a large number of international student. It can be hard to have continuity. Also, I believe for someone to feel like they belong to the parish, they need to be able to have avenues to volunteer and serve in. At present, I just don't see many opportunities in ministries, outreach and missions. In all honesty, many parishioners are simply Sunday goers with the regular ones who serve i.e, music, liturgy. I do feel that this survey is a good step by AOY/CAM to engage the Catholic community more in Melbourne so good on ya!*
- *Diocese should invest in getting a teacher from secondary schools to be part paid by the diocese. Their role is to connect students back to the parish. Flash mob masses, good music ministries in the parish could be a part of the school music program. Schools are comparatively resource rich with constant access to youth, parishes are the opposite.*
- *More financial support from parish/diocese. It would be good if the parish or diocese could offer the space we use for weekly youth group for free instead of asking for monthly payments. Also more financial support for our larger events - our request for funding to use a diocese property - the CLC - was rejected in 2015.*
- *My involvement is mostly in a school setting, at [xxxx] College, rather than a parish setting.*
- *Our youth ministry mainly focus on tertiary level (university students) and we feel lack of support from the Archdiocese, which only focus on secondary level youth group. We hope that there is a better program in line to help and shape youth ministry in tertiary level.*
- *This was completed with two ideas of our youth ministry - one is social the other faith based*

Conclusions

Survey of Young People

This survey has provided a snapshot of some of the young people in youth groups and youth activities in Catholic parishes around the Archdiocese of Melbourne. It is likely that the picture is skewed by the fact that completing the survey was voluntary and young people did it in their own time. It is highly likely that the most involved and committed young people completed the survey and the responses do not reflect young people on the edges of the youth groups.

The figures on involvement demonstrate this picture of the respondents. Four out of five attended their youth activities most of the time something was happening, and 97 per cent of them also attended Mass once a week or more often. Nearly all of them indicated that one or both parents had had a strong influence on their faith and in the vast majority of cases the parents attended Mass regularly. Eighty-six per cent of them said that they attended a church weekly or more often when they were in primary school.

It would appear from these responses that the youth ministries are catering almost exclusively for young people raised in Catholic Mass-attending families. The youth ministry is building on the socialisation that has occurred first in the family. It is possible that other young people do attend, however, but have not responded to the survey.

These young people are generally highly committed to their Catholic faith and to the parish. Eighty-nine per cent of them affirmed belief in a personal God involved in the lives of people, while the remaining eleven per cent believed in either a creation God who was not involved in the world now or some sort of spirit or life force.

The Young People

They young people scored relatively highly on the measures of all the dimensions of faith: with a strong 'sticky' faith, which they applied to their everyday lives and were committed to, and which they saw as shaping their lives. However, they were divided in the extent to which they approached faith uncritically or reflectively.

They also scored fairly high on their positive attitudes to themselves, the natural environment, wider society and in their relationships with friends and family.

They were moderate to highly satisfied with most areas of their lives, particularly with their life as a whole, their friends and their sense of meaning in life.

The Youth Groups

Most of the young people strongly affirmed the youth ministry in which they were involved. Around 10 per cent of them rated them at 0 or negatively on a scale of -5 to +5, and the average score was 3.2.

It is difficult to provide youth ministry that caters well for every type of young person. Those who enjoyed thinking about ideas and concepts and those who found enjoyment in practical ways tended to score the youth ministry a little less positively. One might also ask whether the youth groups were catering well for young people at different stages of their faith. From those who responded, it would seem that they were catering very well for those with a strong commitment to their Catholic

faith from Mass-attending families, but may not have been catering so well for other young people.

The young people who responded to the survey were very positive about the youth leaders. They saw them as passionate about the youth themselves and taking their safety and well-being seriously. The leaders also took the young peoples' questions seriously, genuine caring and easy to relate to. However, there was less affirmation that their leaders were well organised or that they encouraged the young people to think about the wider community.

The Church

It has been noted that almost all the young people who responded to this survey attended Mass frequently. Indeed, many of them were involved in the life of the parish and in other parishes, often with music and drama, children's ministries and Mass or other liturgies. They felt very accepted and supported by parishioners, and many knew the older people in the church and had strong relationships with them. Most indicated the parish priest was involved in the youth group. This bodes well for these young people remaining involved in the life of the parish community in the future.

They were also positive about recent experiences at Mass. They generally saw them as relevant to their lives, connected them with their Catholic tradition, and helped them feel close to God. Few of them found Mass boring, difficult to understand or made them feel uncomfortable.

General Conclusions

The responses to the youth survey draw a picture of young people who have grown up in Mass-attending families finding the youth ministry as confirming their faith and helping that faith to grow. At the same time, the youth ministry has helped the young people develop strong relationships with each other. They believe in a personal God and feel close to God. They see their faith as shaping their lives, giving them good values to live by and expect to retain their faith and continue parish involvement in the future.

There are some hints, according to the young people, that although the youth leaders are passionate about the young people and the faith, they are not always well organised or are able to help the young people look beyond themselves and their immediate group.

One of the great challenges in youth ministry is reaching out to youth in the wider community. There is only a little evidence here that that is happening broadly. However, the youth ministries in the various parishes in the Archdiocese are doing well in building the faith of the young people who attend their activities.

Survey of Youth Ministry Leaders

Activities

The youth leaders who responded to the survey indicated a variety of youth activities were offered at least occasionally in their youth ministry. The most regular activities included youth groups and small groups for discussion or study. The leaders estimated that 78 per cent of young people in their programs came from mainly parish backgrounds or connected because of friends who did.

Leadership

Most of the leaders felt they had a strong passion for young people and could communicate well with and understand the needs of young people. They felt the need for further theological training, for financial resources and for leadership training resources. They felt supported mostly by others in their leadership team

Goals and support

Most of the youth leaders indicated the importance of helping young people to develop a sense of worth, healthy relationships and a relationship with God. They considered highly important the various goals in their youth ministry to assist young people to develop strong friendships, to value themselves as individuals, and to develop a relationship with and feel close to God.

To support them in their aims, they felt most supported by other youth ministry leaders in their team, and also from their parish priest. In general, the leaders felt there were pathways for young people to get involved in their local parish.

Issues and challenges

Overall, youth leaders considered their youth ministry was performing best in providing a safe social environment for young people. Other aspects which were rated moderately well included developing a strong sense of community, growing faith of young people, and forming young people to openly share their faith.

Most of the leaders did not feel overly challenged by the various issues they faced in their youth ministry. Overall, getting consistent youth participation and connecting with young people outside of the parish were considered the most challenging areas of their ministry.

General conclusions

A Vision for effective youth ministry noted a widespread myth that effectiveness in youth ministry is wholly dependent upon the leader. While leadership is important in any ministry, it is the way the various factors come together that makes the real difference to local parish youth ministry (Hughes, Reid & Fraser, 2016, p. 43).

The picture drawn by the diversity of responses to the leaders survey indicates that youth ministry leaders understand the importance of developing strong relationships with and between their youth, other leaders, parishioners, and the parents of the youth involved.

The leaders show a genuine passion for young people, and strongly seek to provide a safe environment for the youth. They have a yearning for those involved in their programs and activities to develop a strong devotional and applied faith, to build strong social connections, and to assist in encouraging young people's self value.

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