



Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle
2018 Synod of Bishops XV Ordinary General Assembly
Young people, the Faith and Vocational Discernment
Feedback for undertaking consultation and providing feedback
to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
on the Youth Synod questions

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List the main types of pastoral activity in accompaniment and vocational discernment in your present situation (*You may wish to refer back to your responses in Q8 and Q9*). (One page limit) ... 20

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Introduction

The Bishops Commission for Church Ministry and the Bishops Commission for Family, Youth & Life corresponded with Bishop Bill in April inviting our diocese to participate in a response to the 2018 Synod of Bishops XV Ordinary General Assembly: *Young people, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*. The diocese was invited to provide feedback to the Synod questionnaire via a diocesan-led consultation process as well as inviting people in the 16-29 age group to respond to an online survey.

The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle established a reference group consisting of the Executive of the Diocesan Council of Ministry with Young People (DCMYP): James Elliott, Maryanne Hacker and Baden Ellis who were supported by the Diocesan Pastoral Support Unit.

The task of the reference group was to:

1. support, advise and guide diocesan consultation for the Synod questionnaire in the spirit intended by Pope Francis and
2. support the process of consultation regarding the Year of Youth in 2018.

The reference group identified six locations across the diocese in which to conduct open focus group meetings, based on the questions at the end of the Preparatory Document - *Young people, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*.

The following groups were identified and communicated with directly as contributors to the focus group process and/or the online survey:

- CSO – All Year 11 and 12 students and some staff
- CSO – staff in schools
- Diocesan Council of Ministry with Young People
- University Chaplaincy
- CatholicCare Social Services
- Vocations – Fr Brian Mascord
- Indigenous voices – Aboriginal Catholic Ministry
- Refugee Service and other CatholicCare programs
- St Vincent de Paul Society
- Office of Life and Faith
- Sports Chaplaincy.

As well as the focus groups and online survey, people were invited to complete the questionnaire via our website. There was wide promotion across our diocese of this consultative process.

Each diocese was asked to submit a 20-page report after this consultation process.

It appears from the data received from ACBC via the Pastoral Research Office that about 760 people participated in the online survey while around 70 people of mixed age groups, ethnicity and religious practice, male and female, gathered for the focus group meetings across the diocese. Only one person responded to the questionnaire via our website.

Section 2 Evaluating the Situation

Young People, the Church and Society

These questions refer both to young people who take part in Church programs, as well as those who do not take part or have no interest in participating.

1. In what manner does the church listen to the lived situations of young people?

Overview

In our diocese, attempts are made to listen to the lived situation in the following ways: The creation of the Diocesan Council for Ministry with Young People, 20,000 students in Catholic schools and their families, University chaplaincy, CatholicCare – 170 young people in care, and through Youth groups.

However, people in society don't recognise these attempts, unless explicitly connected to the parish communities (eg youth groups), as 'church'. The perception of church is limited to the building. As such, these attempts fall short. At times there is a tendency to 'do things for' young people, rather than 'listen' to their lived situations.

The Australian secular society has impacted young people and they don't feel heard, or seek to be heard by the church.

Raw Data

Positive:

- Young people want to participate in youth ministry. ActIV8 youth groups began in Chisholm parish ten years ago. These began after WYD 2008. The region had tried different types of programs - this current program works.
- CatholicCare counselling is offered to young people. Although counsellors will not give spiritual answers. In Australian society GPs are trusted, but having them meeting the need is a third party transaction - not a community. This still leaves someone isolated.
- The Diocesan Council for Ministry with Young People has been running in our diocese since 2011. It is a council of volunteers that plans events for young people and supports the youth groups and youth work that is taking place. It is also responsible for heading up WYD and Australian Catholic Youth Festival for our diocesan contingent.
- Schools listen to young people.
- Chaplains at University of Newcastle are present.

Challenges:

- Secular society says that church is not relevant to young people today.
- Youth aren't coming to Mass as they don't have an understanding of it.
- Beyond school, there are not many ways to connect with young people if they have not been reached at school. Some teachers do take on a personal connection which stays, but this varies from teacher to teacher.
- Few young people seek chaplaincy at university. Church, as a whole, doesn't do it well. Individuals can do it well.
- One example that we're not connected – no young people are here in this focus group conversation.
- An 18 yr-old shared that the church doesn't listen to things that are important to her. It's about the way it's said. "Someone preaching at her, by a bunch of people that live in a faraway land. Old white men."

- We are living in a different time. Society is changing.
- Young people who have completed the online survey shared that it didn't allow them to have a conversation. One participant kept pressing 'other' button, because the survey didn't provide opportunities to respond.

2. What are the main challenges and most significant opportunities for young people in your country today?

Overview

We received a variety of responses to this question. It was noted that those members of the community who were born overseas, including but not exclusively refugees, were more vocal in identifying opportunities presented by living here. They spoke particularly of opportunities around freedom, education and leadership. Those who have not known another way of life were more aware of the challenges presented by life in Australia, key among which were issues around mental health, under-employment, lack of sense of belonging and community and the paradox of being disconnected by social media. Traditional support structures that in the past were taken for granted can no longer be relied upon.

The conversations also explored the challenges of living as a faith community in an increasingly secular society. Young people fear ridicule and derision if they're open about their faith, even within our Catholic schools. The legacy of child sexual abuse in the diocese has tarnished not only the institution of the church but also anyone who remains an active member of its community. Finally, there is a general loss of trust in society's institutions and leaders, including the church.

Raw Data

Opportunities:

- **Opportunity of Being Australian:** Young people are blessed to be here.
- **Opportunities for new ideas:** If new ideas are supported by the clergy or lay leaders, young people feel included and can make a huge impact. Personal invitation by the Ministry Co-ordinator at school also impacted young people.
- **Opportunities in youth seeking strong leadership:** Society today is desperate for strength in parties and clear direction politically eg One Nation, Nigel Farage, Trump, Penn. These people are influential. Young people want a clear leader. There is now a tendency toward the extreme.
- You can be a radical saint as Pope Francis mentions in the letter 'You can change things'. Catholic identity – we do it for others because the love of Christ compels us. Different from humanism. Different from other denominations. Make that clear. Church can offer something radically different.
- Not understanding the 'why' of what we do as Catholics. Eg Importance of chastity. They have questions, such as the real presence in Eucharist. It is not taught in schools. If parents don't understand, how can they teach their children? Young people need honest, not sugar-coated answers.
- Church needs to 'make up its mind' on what it is about. Can't be all things to all people. In the earlier days we knew what church expected of you. Now it's commercial, and church will give any answer that they think young people want to hear. No clear lines - anything you want to do is acceptable.
- **Opportunity of rebranding of church** - not rules, but seeing it as a friendship, reconciliation is about joy of God's forgiveness. That can get lost in translation. Secular media will beat down the church. Pope Francis speaking love and kindness. The opportunities presented by Vatican II. Power of having a strong but

loving message. It is the right word for the young generation. Pope Francis is the bishop of bishops. Broadcast that message - love, hope, unconditional fellowship.

Challenges:

- **Challenges of young people:** Mental illness, isolated from society, don't feel God is an answer. Religion doesn't help them overcome a challenging situation. Turned to music, physical activity, yoga, meditation, sport, animals. Contact with another person.
- It needs to be ok when you're figuring out what you believe. Why are we losing teens? They need to have the space to ask questions.
- Young people born here have had no opportunity to experience difficult things in life. They are missing resilience – haven't had difficult times. Asking 'Why is that happening to me?'
- Online bullying; insults put in writing and sent to everyone; intimidation and abuse.
- **Belonging:** People can feel isolated when they attend church – they can be invisible. Social interactions before and after Mass are needed. The community can change this around. Everyone wants a sense of belonging and connection.
- Sense of community missing.
- Parishioners are a role model for young people. Members of parish were welcoming young people. Taking time out of their lives to ask after young people. Young people seek immediate gratification – only giving something one chance, giving up if it doesn't work. Therefore, parishioners need to jump on the opportunity that brings a young person to a parish.
- Need for parishes to connect with school students. Then continue that link-through all school years. There are transition times for young people: kindy, Yr 6, Yr 11, Yr 12, then at university. At these times they are more open to talk with people. That's when they ask questions.
- **Family:** A mum doesn't make kids go to church - she resented it when she was made to go. If they don't go, how will the kids make up their mind if they are never exposed to it? Parents need to explain to their kids the importance of Mass. Programs to explain sacraments. Parents who don't know, can't explain it.
- People avoid Mass – goes longer, not going to sit through it. Therefore, not connecting with new families. Participants drop each week due to excuses – too cold, clashes with sport etc.
- If parents have faith, that is passed on to the children, it will stay with them throughout life, even if they go away from the church - it is still drawing them back.
- When young people describe their grandparents, they would describe them as kind etc. They don't associate that with church.
- **Religious Orders not seen:** Nuns and brothers are not there anymore - nothing has taken its place. Link between secular and religious life is missing.
- Priests need to be more willing to come to schools. Church 80 metres away - due to lack of priests fitting into timetables, they don't come to school. Drop in if church was open. Young people do need to withdraw somewhere.
- Young people don't see the priests as human beings. Hearing background story of them could help. Clergy involved in things not religion based - could result in a slight change of attitude. If clergy are fear-filled, young people pick up on that.

- **Catholic Schools:** Many teachers are not practising Catholics. Schools can't act as that link if they don't have their own faith. Young people can pick up whether the teacher is authentic.
- Schools are the main form of contact with church. But they are run to government standards, not church standards.
- Altar servers - will assist in parish but not in their school – due to the stigma. Even going to a Catholic school - faith is still taboo.
- Catholic schools are a better choice of schools. Parents not Catholic, but the school is not expecting anything from parents.
- It is about the passion of the people who run RE in schools. Do schools approach it with that much passion? If people did approach with that passion, that energy would flow on. Personal witness.
- Schools have more engagement in social justice activities. Young people see the relevance of it. There is an opportunity to link young people to a 'tangible', lived Jesus through social justice activities.
- **Australian society is very secular:**
- Humanism has taken over the church influence. There are many prejudices towards church.
- View if you are not practising faith, you are an atheist. Census recorded religion. Encouraging people to choose 'atheist' affects church funding.
- Fear of ridicule by peers at school, if they claim they are atheist - that is the politically correct answer.
- Faith is not dead, but can be seen as not showing up to Mass which seems irrelevant, but through social justice works, eg See, Judge, Act. Faith in action
- **Abuse scandal:** Year 12 Student had asked friends their view. A Marist brother had assaulted a child. They are politically against the church. Aware of what had happened. They choose to see the past, not see the positive anymore.
- Teacher said "Priests postpone going to the school, because of abuse crisis." They are scared to go. This is a real problem which needs to be addressed.
- There is a perception that church has lost moral high ground.
- No one used to question the goodness of clergy and church, now they do.
- Despite everything that has happened around royal commission there is no physical vandalising of churches.
- **Challenge of spread out parishes:** Problem is too few priests, spread too thin.
- In country NSW, Mass once a month. That was a problem. Need a solution for priest shortage. Personalities matter too. Some are good at talking to kids - different strengths. Solution - employ lay people.
- **Challenges for non-Catholic young people:** Refugee students that have not had exposure to church before (other than in movies) see it as a way to get rid of sin, listen to someone talk, don't see it as relevant.
- They have not seen the outreach and help that have been shown to them as 'church'.
- Catholic schools have invited them in, paid school fees and welcomed more refugee students to increase sense of belonging and stop loneliness. The students agree that that is what church should do.
- At school they are taught about the life of Jesus, but still see church as rules and regulations.
- 17 year-old articulated the difference between faith and reason. Shared that as a Muslim, his family saw happenings as fate, or God's will. As he has had more education, he no longer thinks that way.

3. What kinds and places of group gatherings of youth, institutionalised or otherwise, have a major success *within* the Church, and why?

Overview

For the purpose of this question, 'church' is defined as the wider church, not just the Roman Catholic Community.

The common theme when looking at the kinds and places of gatherings which have a major success within the church were gatherings that created a sense of community and where attendees felt genuinely cared about and valued.

Music was a significant factor perceived as essential for success, with the example of Christian denominations such as Hillsong seen to be thriving because of its vibrant praise and worship.

Also, informal gatherings which provide an opportunity for faith formation in a social environment such as Pints With A Purpose were deemed successful.

Raw Data:

- Antioch was successful previously. Youth to youth ministry. Music-based ministry seems to work.
- Somersby – Divine Retreat Centre. Charismatic retreat centre, welcoming community.
- Sisters of St Joseph, Tenison Woods Education Centre, created opportunities for faith formation.
- Youth Mass: young people get involved, but stop attending when they get older. Some come back when they are parents because they have had a foundation.
- Pints with a Purpose – gathering in a pub once a month to hear a speaker on a Catholic topic and then having a conversation.
- Music in other churches is 'big'. Other Christian denominations call people to participate in music ministry. Thriving because of praise and worship. People enjoy the experience, music and relationships.

4. What kinds and places of group gatherings of youth, institutionalised or otherwise, have a major success *outside* the Church, and why?

Overview

Outside church young people are searching for sense of community. A cultural shift tends to occur as young people get older. From late teens to early twenties night clubs, music festivals and sporting events are places of gathering, use of alcohol and other drugs as the means for gathering.

Raw Data:

- Sport - stadiums are full of passionate people.
- Community comes with sport.
- Nippers on Sunday morning.
- Music Festivals - gathering for a common purpose, same age group, fun, drinking culture.
- Nightclubs and bars.

5. What do young people really ask of the Church in your country today?

Overview

In this question, we encountered a limited understanding of what church is and can be. Those who identified as asking nothing of the church saw it as the institution manifested solely in the Mass on Sunday. However, those who understood the broader meaning of church identified a desire for a sense of belonging and community. Young people want to feel valued as members of their community, and know that they'll be missed if they are absent. They expressed a desire for the greater formation during the Mass so that the full meaning of Eucharist can be understood and experienced. Finally, it was identified that the church is at its strongest when it is being missionary, especially in social outreach of community engagement. The view was expressed that the good works of the church are not made known, which further contributes to the general population's narrow understanding of what church is.

Raw Data:

Nothing:

- Why would they ask the church? Unaware of what is available to them, therefore don't connect and don't ask out of 'ignorance' more than rejecting the church. See church as institution, not as a people of God movement.

Belonging and sense of identity:

- To be welcomed and included. Noticed when they are there and missed when they are not.
- Given opportunities by priests - included in plans, encouraged to try new things (outreaches, youth groups etc).
- Some young people come because they see an inner circle, once they are in it, they feel they belong. The tradition and breadth of the church is intriguing.
- Asking young people to share at Mass once they have experienced an opportunity such as WYD or Australian Catholic Youth Festival. Do they get supported when they return?

Making a difference:

- Clear cut, certainty. Young people are seeking that. Even politically. You can elect not to follow it, but you know what it is. Need definite answers. Not populist.
- Accountable. Knowing you'll be missed. Have you made a difference to anyone else? Team sports expect young people to show up and commit.
- If young people saw the outreach that happens through church it would be more attractive. Young people are action people. Social Justice.
- Young people like being engaged. A teacher incorporated relevant topics into RE class, eg bullying, the environment, which made them want to pray for things. Talking about the problems of their generation.
- Church should not be afraid of addressing the issues. One participant thought priests were afraid of getting someone off side, scared to talk about specific issues. He wanted to hear about issues he heard on the news.

6. What possibilities for participation exist in your country for young people to take part in the life of the ecclesial community?

Overview:

While there are some opportunities for young people to be involved in the life of the ecclesial community such as youth Masses, youth groups, sacramental programs and invitations through Catholic schools to parish events (and vice versa), there is a recognition that more needs to be done.

Many young people expressed that attendance at Mass didn't necessarily meet their spiritual needs. The reasons for this included lack of trust/connection with clergy, lack of sense of belonging/value within the community and lack of understanding of the Mass.

Raw data:

- Catholic schools are invitational, including the parish community to events, and vice versa, but this can always increase.
- Youth group in Glendale and some other parishes.
- Sacramental programs offer an opportunity for parents to bring in their kids.
- Parishes
- Youth Masses – opportunity for music ministry, reading, serving, etc.

7. How and in what manner is contact made with young people who do not frequent church surroundings?

Overview

In our diocese there are many attempts made to reach out to young people who do not go to church. Catholic schools have many programs, and make a deliberate effort to share faith with young people. The schools have also welcomed refugee students who are not able to afford the school fees.

Youth groups are run to gather young people, plus social justice initiatives, Vinnies Youth and Mini Vinnies. There is also a plan to run the program 'Young Christian Students' in schools next year.

The Community Care Van feeds homeless young people every Saturday in a local park, and CatholicCare reaches out through Supported Independent Living, Out of Home Care, and leavers programs.

Even though we reach out in these ways, we discovered that young people do not realise how the church is connected to their lives. Agencies reach out to young people, but they do not connect it to what they believe church is.

Raw Data:

- Catholic schools have welcomed refugee students who are not able to afford the school fees. St Mary's, Maitland also brought more refugee students who were friends with the first student.
- Youth group – lights on, food, fun, simple things work. In a country environment, the young people come on scooters. The leaders don't know parents, they come on their own.
- YCS in schools is planned to launch in the next year.
- Social justice initiatives; Vinnies Youth; Mini Vinnies.
- Community care van feeds homeless every Saturday in park.
- CatholicCare- Supported Independent Living, Out of Home Care, leavers programs.

Pastoral Vocational Programs for Young People

8. How are families and communities involved in the vocational discernment of young people?

Overview:

In our diocese, vocational discernment is not currently part of major conversations that would occur in families. Young people seek a 'career' rather than faith-based options. Marriage, if chosen, is often not seen as a vocation in which God plays a significant part, even for those who choose to marry in the church. Single people often felt excluded from the conversation around vocational call as a single person, even though they are called to minister in their parishes, schools, workplaces and wider community.

Traditional vocational discernment to the priesthood and religious life is rarely encouraged, however this is presented as an option at school leadership retreats.

Reality:

- Parents can instil a sense of faith in kids. Even if youth fall away, that foundation will draw them back. One participant shared "I needed the church, so I came back."
- In alternate years to WYD and ACYF we need to do a festival here draw them in. WYD is a pivotal moment for many people. We need to provide a number of different opportunities for young people to connect.
- Missing link in generation is parents. They don't drive young people to Mass or church events etc. Opportunities such as the Australian Catholic Youth Festival experience will stay with them until they are independent.
- If a young person felt called to priesthood parents would try to talk them out of it. Who could they talk to? There is a negativity around priesthood.
- Vocation Sunday.
- Marriage: young people don't have the conversation about the vocation or discernment of marriage. Conversations are not had with/between young people.
- Priests and nuns sometimes go to schools to speak to students – eg Year 12-student leaders' retreat – but they don't mention marriage in that talk. Opportunity missed to have those conversations in schools.
- Are Yrs 11 or 12 even at that point to recognise God, let alone see God as leading them to vocational decisions?
- If you choose a vocation to marriage or single life it's seen as a lesser vocation. Not intentional, but comes across.

9. How do schools and universities or other educational institutions (civil or ecclesial) contribute to young people's formation in vocational discernment?

Overview

Catholic schools contribute to young people's formation in vocational discernment through their expression of their Catholic life, for example, Liturgies/Masses/retreats/prayer experiences. To some extent Religious Education lessons also contribute to this formation; however, for some, Religious Education as a subject is off-putting. Throughout the diocese there is a perception that our Catholic schools do this well, however for many school is the only church connection and with all our eggs in the one basket this can create a challenge once students leave the school community. The Catholic presence at the local university is slowly increasing. A Catholic society has been formed, however there is a perception that more support is needed for young people. Other Christian denominations are more visible on campus.

Raw Data

Our reality:

- At universities more support is needed for young students. A student found a Christian centre, did not find a Catholic chaplaincy.
- A Catholic Society is there now. Where do people go for theology conversations? Does chaplaincy fill need for formation?
- School is the only church connection. RE as a subject is off-putting. Helping others and living out Christ's values, that will be the mark of success. Young people will be involved in helping others but this is not seen as church.
- Two schools adding in simple reflective moments for students: Mercy minutes at 12pm, for four minutes. School is silent. Special bell goes. Simple, reflective. What have you done well, what can you do better?
- Start at 12.10, MacKillop Moments- Contemplation – examen. Moment of gratitude.

Suggestions:

- It is a strength and weakness is that all our eggs are in the schools basket. Personal invitation is more beneficial than anything else, eg Yr 12 retreats. There they can see personal witness to Christ.
- Youth festival designed for those not sitting in church pews. Show them it is important. Promote in schools by other young people.

10. In what manner are you taking into account the cultural changes resulting from the development of the digital world?

Overview

The diocese has been proactive in the use of social media and multimedia. We have an active Facebook presence and use it as the primary means for communicating with the community regarding upcoming events and initiatives. Social media has also been an invaluable tool in maintaining connections between pilgrim's post-face to face encounters, especially WYD and ACYF.

It was clear, however, from our conversations with the broader church community, that awareness of the diocese's online presence was not extensive. A number of young people expressed a desire for online engagement and dissemination of information, unaware that it was already taking place.

Raw Data

Opportunities:

- Facebook page and groups used for retreat groups and Lenten groups. The online connection leads into the face to face experience.
- Pope's Twitter account is excellent.
- Website is where young people go to find Mass times - needs to be easier to find. Point the young people to the social media channels.
- Young people use phones for daily prayer. Muslims read the Koran on the phone. DCMYP will look up a prayer on their phone to lead prayer in a meeting. Powerful way to remind people to pray daily.
- Young people will seek answers on media. They may get bad answers. Churches need to make sure we are putting the answers up.
- Their caring community is social media. Friends will support on the media but won't pick up phone; their norm.
- Facebook group does engage those who have been to ACYF, WYD etc.
- Young people are into instant gratification. Disappointment comes if things can't happen immediately. Talk their language. Use Facebook and media to show that that is not the answer.

Concerns raised:

- World is so different from what it was. So caught up in digital arena, it's difficult for young people to connect to people face to face and build relationships. They need to turn off, connect with others, connect with themselves. Bring young ones in, lead them to influence other young people. Mentoring while they are in school.
- Access on devices - you can get information, but not knowledge, Knowledge is how you process it. Distinction between the two.
- You can't take devices away from young people.
- We think online information is getting out there, but it's not.

11. How can World Youth Days or other national or international events become a part of ordinary pastoral practice?

Overview:

Our diocesan participants in WYD and the ACYF and those who attend enjoy the 'mountaintop' experiences. Our challenge is and has been providing opportunities for connection and ongoing formation when we return from these encounters.

Make it not just through schools; link to parishes.

Our diocese ran an Intergenerational WYD last year (2016).

Parishes sponsor students. Hoped they would commit back to a community when they returned. That hasn't happened. They had a mountain top experience, they needed a relational thing to come back to. It was a missed opportunity.

There needs to be a community link before, during and after WYD.

12. In what manner is your diocese planning experiences for the pastoral vocational program for young people?

Overview:

During 2015 and 2016 the diocese ran a Pastoral Placement Program which gave young people the opportunity to explore a variety of ministries across the diocese while being supported by mentors and supervisors. They were also given experiences for faith and personal formation.

There is recognition that no matter what experiences are provided there is a need to unpack these in the light of the gospel message and Jesus Christ.

Raw Data:

- Pastoral Placement Program ran for two years, is not running currently due to financial restraints. It gave opportunities for young people to do placements for one year in the different agencies in the diocese. Aim was to see if they felt called to work in ministry with the church.
- Community care van – feeds homeless at the park on a Saturday.
- Schools immersion programs
- Ecumenical Social Justice League: Practical experiences for young people to put faith into action, such as volunteering in the community kitchen.
- Annual retreats run by the Diocesan Council for Ministry with Young People.

Pastoral Care Workers with Young People

13. How much time and in what manner do clergy and other formators provide for personal spiritual guidance?

Overview

The clergy of the diocese are getting 'long in the tooth' and even smaller in number. This, combined with fear of engagement with young people arising from historical sexual abuse, has hindered their ability to engage meaningfully on an individual basis with youth in the community. Other organisations and initiatives that have historically provided mentoring and spiritual guidance to young people, such as Antioch, are no longer active in the diocese. The DCMYP is attempting to provide spiritual formation opportunities through a range of initiatives including WYD, ACYF, the Be Grow Show retreats and Pints with a Purpose, however it has limited capacity to provide individual mentoring and spiritual guidance.

Raw Data:

- **Our diocesan context:** Aged clergy with many parish commitments, and due to the abuse crisis, they are fearful of young people.
- Many used to be involved in Antioch post school but Antioch has now finished. Lack of support, no sustainability. Not evolving with the times, no new life came in. It met a need that is not being met anymore.
- One participant shared that she was lucky to always have support from clergy. Some in her diocese, and some in other dioceses. She didn't feel supported at school by clergy.
- The Diocesan Council for Ministry with Young People creates opportunities for young people to attend WYD, ACYF, and other experiences such as Be Grow Show retreat.

14. What initiatives and opportunities for formation are in place for those who provide pastoral vocational guidance?

Overview

In our diocese the Adult Faith Formation Council provides opportunities for all people to hear speakers and grow in faith. While attendance varies at these events, young people are rarely present.

One of the major groups in our diocese tasked with providing pastoral vocational guidance are Catholic school teachers.

In recent years there has been encouragement and sponsorship offered for young teachers to attend experiences such as WYD and ACYF.

There have also been a number of educational opportunities provided, such as Cardinal John Dew and Massimo Faggioli and some have been well received and attended.

Some respondents indicated that while these opportunities are worthwhile, when constantly ministering to others there is a need to have formation opportunities that are more spiritually nourishing.

Raw Data:

- For teachers, youth workers & RECs: Nothing from the vocational perspective.
- Diocesan Adult Faith Formation Council provides opportunities for all people in the diocese to hear speakers and grow in faith.
- An idea was shared: once a month or term, bring leaders together for fellowship and discussion. Priest or lay people to run it. For anyone that has connection with youth. Training of some kind.

15. What personal guidance is offered in seminaries?

For our seminarians the care that is given comes in a number of ways.

1. For those who come from overseas:
 - Initial placement in parish to develop relationships within the community. This community acts in a way as a "Home parish" situation for them throughout their training and beyond. We have found this quite successful for those who have participated so far.
 - Support and mentor ship from the parish clergy that the men work with during this time.
2. For those who are from Australia:
 - Prior to entry to seminary a candidate would again be supported by the clergy of their own "Home" parish.
 - Mentor support from another member of the clergy who could support whilst in training.
3. From a diocesan level:
 - Under the direction of the Vocation Director there are regular meetings supporting them in their development.
 - Financial support during training time, Health insurance coverage.
 - Placement during holidays when necessary.
4. During Seminary:
 - Support given through the seminary structures through spiritual direction and counselling opportunities.

Specific Questions According to Geographic Areas

- a. Why and how do religious gatherings by those who are non-Catholic exercise an attraction on young people?

Overview:

Non-Catholic religious' gatherings appear to have a lot more energy associated with them because of the younger 'audience' who gathers, the music that is used and the greater sense of community and connection. Preaching from pastors or other people in the community seems to be more inspiring. Other churches also tend to have one whole gathering on a Sunday which people value as a place to share their stories and be noticed and accepted. They tend to do intentional community, particularly with families and young people.

Raw Data:

- People are friendly, great singing. Invited into the church by someone they know. Personal invitation drew them in.
- Interesting, more engaging. They are not stuck to a set way of doing church, the Spirit can lead and change the service.
- Greater focus on relationship than Catholic church.
- People's souls are touched through music. When an opportunity is given to meet with God through extended sessions of music, people experience God's closeness in a way they haven't before.
- Other churches emphasise small groups and gatherings together. This is not promoted in the Catholic church.
- There is an emphasis that everyone can do God's work in other churches, eg preaching can be done by females.
- There is also a greater focus on outreach, and opportunity and encouragement is given to get involved in local outreaches.
- At a Baptist church a survey is given at end of each service. 'What do you want to know more about? What didn't you understand?' Then the pastor answers the questions. They had a younger preacher and found belonging there.
- Meet for food. Link with activities. Eg bowling, dance, movies, together with friends, then given the message.

- b. In what way can the values of a local culture be combined with Christian teaching, while also giving importance to popular piety?

Overview:

Australian society is increasingly secular. The historic role of the church as a moral compass for the population has been deemed by many to be redundant, with the principles of humanism being pointed to as a broadly accepted basis for moral formation. What is less widely acknowledged is that humanistic values are derived extensively from Christian moral teaching. It was felt that there are significant opportunities to remind young people of the counter-cultural nature of Christ's teachings and that without them, many of the social norms that are taken for granted would not exist.

Raw Data:

- In Australian society humanism and secularism are followed.
- There could be an opportunity to try to show the actions of Jesus through this lens.
- Humanism
- Secularism.

c. How is the language used in a young people's world incorporated in the pastoral care of young people, especially in the media, sports and music?

Overview:

In our conversations it emerged that there was very little connection between the common language of young people and the formal church. Therefore, the language of the Mass has very little perceived relevance to the spiritual lives of young people.

Raw data:

- Rules of liturgy are too restrictive.
- For Mass in sacramental programs, plans had to be submitted for review. Pictures on PowerPoints were removed. Colour taken off so it didn't distract people. This caused distress for music ministry. They don't want to be involved again, because of frustration this year. Rules get in the way of community.
- Attempts to use modern communication and terms, YouTube etc, are stomped on by 'rules'.
- Limited in use of media in Cell groups due to copyright limitations.
- Youth Masses attempt to incorporate youthful music.
- Diocesan praise and worship band, Spirit + Truth, puts on worship events to attract young people.

Synod Questionnaire, Section 3 - "Sharing Activities"

Name of Diocese: Maitland-Newcastle

List the main types of pastoral activity in accompaniment and vocational discernment in your present situation (*You may wish to refer back to your responses in Q8 and Q9*).

(One page limit)

1) Pastoral Placement Program:

- One year program to assist young people to discern their place in the church, experiencing the different agencies run by the Catholic Church in Maitland-Newcastle.

2) Collaboration with Catholic Schools Office regarding participation in World Youth Day/Australian Catholic Youth Festivals

3) Diocesan Council for Ministry with Young People run activities:

- Be Grow Show Retreat
- Taking groups to ACYF and WYD
- Pints With A Purpose - monthly talks in a local pub on Catholic topics.
- S@SH (Seven at Sacred Heart) – monthly adoration for young people.

Diocesan Pastoral Placement Program

Description

The purpose of this one-year program is to provide pastoral placements for those seeking to explore the opportunities to serve God and God's people through ministries of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

Participants are placed in as many of the following ministries as possible to get sense of what is involved in working in the mission field of diocesan life. Some of those placements could be with:

- Parishes
- Chaplaincies – Hospitals, University, Port, Prison, Schools
- Clinical Pastoral Education
- Catholic Schools – Administration, Pastoral Care, Teaching
- CatholicCare Social Services – Youth, Out of Home Care, Disability Programs, Refugee Service, Community Care Van
- Pastoral Ministries – Parish Family Liaison, Mum's Cottage, Seasons for Growth, Chancery
- Children's Ministries – SRE, Sacraments of Initiation, Children's Liturgy of the Word, School Chaplaincy
- Youth Ministries – ACTiv8 Chisholm, LifeTeen, Diocesan Council of Ministry to Young People (DCMYP), World Youth Day, Australian Catholic Youth Festival Aged Care
- Overseas Aid and Development – Caritas, Catholic Mission

Analysis

The Pastoral Placement Program provides experiences for young people to explore what it might mean for them to proclaim Christ in word and deed. It provides them with opportunity to discern the voice of the Spirit in their lives while sharing their gifts, hopes and ideas as a source of renewal for our local church.

Each participant works with the program facilitator to discern their specific experiences for the year. Participants are engaged and remunerated for 10 hours a week, with a commitment of 4 of those hours in their home parish. Apart from the individual placements, time is given for training, formation, mentoring and professional and spiritual supervision.

The participants of the program are made feel part of the life of their parishes, the diocese and the many organisations where they experience a placement.

Evaluation

By engaging in this program, the hope has been that the participants will experience a real encounter with Jesus Christ which may lead to the discovery of a personal vocation and to full participation in the life of the Church.

Those who have participated in the program have remained committed to the life of the church. They found the experiences to be very valuable for their own personal and professional formation. Some used it as a gap year experience and have gone on to choose courses at university that will possibly enable them to work in ministry.

A significant strength was having about half a dozen young people in ministry together as they formed a community and bonds of being on mission in our local church. Some of our parishes indicated that it took their young people away from the life of the parish because this was a diocesan initiative and because they were remunerated for their 'work' in their parish, once the program finished, they no longer made themselves available for parish ministry.

Collaboration with Catholic Schools Office regarding participation in World Youth Day/Australian Catholic Youth Festivals

Description

When organising diocesan participation in World Youth Day and the Australian Catholic Youth Festivals, a conscious decision has been made for the diocese (through the Diocesan Council for Ministry with Young People (DCMYP)) to take the lead in facilitating participation in these events.

The DCMYP assists in discerning the appointment of volunteer co-ordinators for these events. An event team is then established which includes a representative from the Catholic Schools Office (CSO). The event team then disseminates information to schools and the wider diocesan community. The event team also looks after all logistical elements of the preparation, including formation for participants and recruitment and training of group leaders/supervisors.

Analysis

There were many factors which contributed to the implementation of this approach.

Firstly, there was a recognition that Catholic schools in our diocese for many are the only point of contact with the church. Most of our diocesan Catholic schools were successfully creating opportunities for young people to develop a relationship with Jesus and had developed vibrant faith communities within the schools.

It became evident that creating links between the school and the parish/diocese was an area which needed to be addressed so that when young people finished their schooling and left the school community this didn't also signify the end of their faith journey. As such, this collaborative approach gave the DCMYP an opportunity to create connections and build relationships within school communities which would hopefully lead to post-school engagement.

Secondly, this approach supported the diocesan vision '*Many parts. One body. One Mission*'. as the DCMYP and Catholic schools work together in fulfilling the church's mission.

Evaluation

This initiative has had mixed success. Certainly, there has been greater communication and collaboration between the DCMYP and the CSO, particularly the RE and Spirituality Department. While there has been some improvement with the engagement of schools in regular youth ministry initiatives, this has been limited.

The most significant challenges have been, at times, a lack of understanding of the complexities of the governance requirements of schools and miscommunication between the schools and the diocese which has led to sometimes avoidable complications.

Diocesan Council for Ministry with Young People

Description

The Diocesan Council for Ministry with Young People (DCMYP) is the body responsible for overseeing diocesan youth ministry initiatives and advising the Bishop on issues pertaining to youth ministry. The council was established in 2012, and consist of a group of 10-12 volunteers drawing from various youth ministry backgrounds and experiences across the Diocese. The DCMYP is responsible for coordinating Diocesan involvement in major events such as WYD and ACYF, as well as supporting and fostering local youth ministry initiatives including Pints with a Purpose, Seven at Sacred Heart (Adoration), the Be Grow Show annual retreat for young people, and periodic praise and worship gatherings. The DCMYP maintains an active presence in social media, using Facebook and Instagram to connect with and inform young people across the Diocese.

Analysis

A defining characteristic of the DCMYP is the voluntary nature of its constituency. There are no employed youth ministers working for the Diocese, although some regions and parishes have employed youth ministers on a local level. This unique arrangement comes with both strengths and challenges. Being a voluntary body opens participation in youth ministry to anyone with gifts to share in the whole church, not just those with a professional interest in the field. Over the years, the council has benefited from the varied experience and wisdom of teachers, medical professionals, financial specialists, academics, scientists and engineers. The diocese believes that the employment of a full time youth ministry coordinator would reduce opportunities for the broader lay community to exercise their call to ministry. The work of volunteers has also allowed the limited diocesan budget to be directed towards funding initiatives and participation in major events.

Being a voluntary organisation is not without its challenges though, chief among them being members being time poor and susceptible to burn out. While the initiatives supported and coordinated by the council have been successful overall, there is an acknowledgement that we can only do what we can with the time and resources available.

The council has been effective in utilising social media as a youth ministry tool, both in the dissemination of information, and also in maintaining connections between participants in diocesan events.

Evaluation

The DCMYP has been an overall success. It has been functioning continuously for the past five years, providing an avenue for the disparate young people of Maitland-Newcastle to feel connected to a community of young believers, even if one does not exist in their parish. The council has successfully overseen Diocesan Involvement in two WYD and ACYF, with the upcoming Sydney ACYF promising to be our largest pilgrimage of young people as a diocese to date. The local initiatives supported by the council have fluctuating levels of attendance, and there is certainly scope for their future growth and innovation.

The council continues to struggle with the challenges of sustainability, burn out and succession planning that result from its voluntary nature, and is exploring avenues with the Diocesan executive on how to ensure the long term viability of this unique and effective approach to diocesan youth ministry.