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OFFICE
FOR

Youth

Starting a Youth Group



www.cam.org.au/youth



So you want to start a Youth Group?

You have this document because you want to start a youth group – good work! The team at the Archdiocesan Office for Youth (AOY) have put this together to help you with the logistics of starting up. It will go through a lot of practical points as well as getting you to think a little more about the purpose of your group. We understand that all youth groups are different; some focus on prayer, some on service, others on liturgy... the list goes on and on but we hope that all of them have a great balance that keep the group inspired by Christ's love.

Working in a group is a fun and encouraging way to get more involved in your parish and help grow in your faith. What's more, there are many programs that have been written to help people working in and with youth groups. Some programs are vast, theologically based and quite complicated where as others are more simple reflections and activity-based.

Some people are more comfortable participating in a youth group formed in their own parish, while others would prefer to participate in school-based groups with their peers. This document has been prepared with parish-based groups in mind; however you will find that the appendices at the end of the document have information on other movements as well as some Catholic service-based models such as the St Vincent de Paul Society and the Young Christian Workers movement.

The AOY is here to help you at anytime, so if you hit a roadblock or need some inspiration, just contact our office - we want to help. We also have lots of great information on our website and we always love to hear about new groups, so what are you waiting for?

ARCHDIOCESAN
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Youth+

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One: Why start a youth group?

Youth groups can be an important part of parish life, their purpose being to nourish youth in a way which is explicit to the Catholic faith. The reasons for starting a youth group can be quite varied, as are the reasons people come wanting to join.

A youth group is a fantastic initiative to start in your parish because it can bring so many positive additions to pre-existing parish life. In 2009, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference produced a resource for Youth Ministers called *Anointed and Sent*, this document highlights three goals in Youth Ministry. The Bishops defined "Why Start a Youth Group?" with the following:

Goal One: To foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person.

Goal Two: To draw young people into responsible participation in the life, mission and work of the Catholic faith community.

Goal Three: To empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today.

So what does all this mean? The goals point to the simple aims of youth ministry: to encourage faith, to build a safe community and to inspire young people to live a life following Jesus' teachings.

The areas where these goals can be developed and explored were identified by the Bishops as: Prayer and Worship, Evangelisation, Catechesis, Pastoral Care, Community Life, Justice and Service, Leadership and Development and Advocacy.

So to answer the question of why start a Youth Group, you could almost say: to build faith, community and lifestyle. How you are going to do that is the next part...





Two: What does a parish-based youth group do?

Youth Groups don't specifically "do" any one thing and it's unlikely that you will find any two that are the same. A youth group will generally meet at a regular time and place. Within that time and place, they might have discussions on scripture, run a catechesis session, share a prayer session, run a youth choir or music ministry for Mass. They may go bowling for a social activity, help in a local op-shop or on a soup van, assist local parishioners or organise a spiritual retreat. When starting out it's always a great idea to visit another Youth Group in your area. Check out what they do and talk to them about what some of their challenges have been. They might even lend a hand whilst you find your feet with a joint activity.

There are all sorts of groups that already exist so you don't need to go reinventing the wheel. If you are interested in forming a group that does God's work through services such as soup vans or refugee programs then groups like the Young Christian Workers movement (YCW) or the St Vincent de Paul Society, may give you the balance you need.

If you are interested in a group that focuses on running mass or reflecting on the Word of God then Antioch or Life Teen might be more suited to your needs. Movements like Antioch and Life Teen have been around for 20 plus years and already have a set format.

The role of a youth group is to bear witness to God. If your parish sees your group praying together, running a children's liturgy, singing at mass or even raising funds for the primary school, they can see Christ's love in action and you'll be amazed at the support and prayers they will offer you.

Just remember that there are so many types of youth groups so the initial meeting where your foundation members / planning committee or core team plan the structure of the group is of vital importance. You, as the driving force of this group, need to have all the information at hand. Have a read through the Appendices in this guide – you might just find exactly what you are looking for!



Three: What is the target age group that you are hoping to work with?

When starting a youth group it is very important to set an age bracket that is not too broad. The focus of a youth group for nine year olds will be very different to a youth group for 29 year olds. This decision will ultimately be decided by the main age bracket of those who are interested in starting the youth group. It would also be a good idea to talk to your Parish Priest about

his thoughts on an appropriate age bracket for a youth group. Remember that if your group is over 18 and going to interact with under 18s, your leaders must legally have Working With Children Checks. Also, it is strongly recommended that you download and read the resource *May Our Children Flourish* available from: www.cam.org.au/caringforchildren.

Four: Is it time to call a meeting?

The next step in setting up a group is to call a meeting. In starting a youth group, there will be two phases. The first is when initiating the group – you may not have all the answers or even a clear direction as to where the group is headed, but that is OK. In this initial meeting it is important that potential members have their opinions heard, hence giving them some 'ownership' of the group when it begins. This core group needs to have a strong plan in mind. You, as the driver of the youth group should consider having a proposal ready for the first meeting. The core members will assist in making a lot of key decisions but remember you really need to find no more than 10 people to start making these decisions. Too many voices can make it difficult to find your feet and get going, make sure that the planning committee is a committed, diverse and manageable number so a range of opinions are heard and that they are really committed to the success of the group.

Now, make a call out to run your first session. You should have a plan in place from your initial meetings – it will take some time to find your feet though so here is just a few little tips to help and don't forget to finish reading this document!

Tips on a successful first session/meeting:

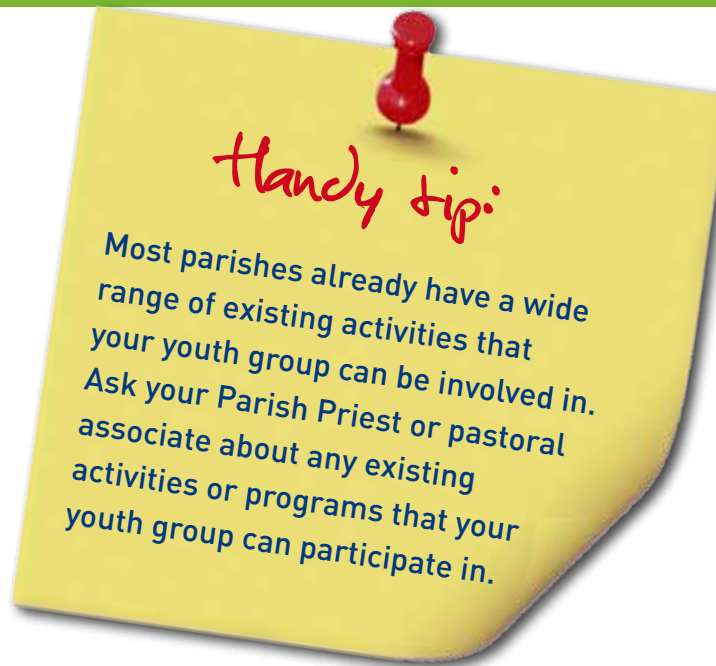
- This is the first impression people will have of the group, so set the tone as to what you want the youth group to be like.
- You want people to enjoy themselves, whether this is through games, having a guest speaker, providing food or lollies, playing a team building activity or whatever you can think of! Chances are if people enjoy themselves, they will come back.
- Have a date and time set for the next meeting (or choose one during the meeting) to capture the enthusiasm of people there and lock them in for the next meeting.
- Have a sheet of paper where everyone can put their details (email, mobile, Facebook, etc.)
- Choose a location for the meeting, and stick to it. This should be a communal place, most youth groups generally meet in their parish meeting room or hall.
- You don't have to call it a 'meeting'; it could be called many things like a gathering, an information session, a group catch up... be creative!
- Pray! Don't forget to ask the Holy Spirit to guide your group and bring you new members.



Five: What do young people want to do?

You, as a leader, might have a simple idea of what you would like the group to do however once the core members of the group are gathered, ask them what they want to do. This gives each member an opportunity to raise their opinion from the very start and reinforces that sense of ownership in the group. You will hear what the members consider to be important to them on a spiritual or social level so you can then discuss and plan appropriate activities and the direction of the group.

It is acknowledged that today's youth do not only want to understand what their faith is but also discuss why it is important to them. A youth group is about expanding someone's understanding of their faith – to challenge it and nurture it to grow further. A greater understanding of the value of prayer and the way we pray can be of benefit as well as looking into catechesis and things such as immersion and mission programs which can inspire Christ's word. There is no need for a Youth Group to be dull – there are so many programs available to keep youth engaged.





Six: How do you fulfil the five elements of youth ministry within your group?

It is important to establish a good balance of the following elements to ensure that your youth group doesn't become too focused in one area whilst neglecting others. We have identified the following five elements of a successful youth group.

Prayer: It is important to pray as a group so make sure you find time when your youth group meets to pray. This could be spontaneous prayer, reflecting on a bible passage or even a formal prayer like the rosary. You could have a member of the youth group prepare a reflection for each gathering.

Service: Service is a way that your youth group can help give back to your parish and the wider community. In your parish you could help with working bees, church cleaning or assisting with the piety store after Mass. In the wider community, you might visit elderly parishioners in nursing homes, raise money for local charities or have a blanket drive for a homeless shelter. You may be able to link in with other groups in the parish who are also involved in service opportunities.

Study: Each youth group should take time to study and educate themselves on the Catholic Faith. Regular study sessions where you look at the Bible or Catechism are important. It would be advised to speak to your Parish Priest about how best to achieve this. Organising a guest speaker to talk on different aspects of the Catholic Faith can also be enriching for your group.

Social: Regular social activities should be organised. From going to dinner as a group to bowling or movies it is always beneficial to spend time together outside your usual youth group time and space. These social activities are also a great way to welcome new people into the group. Many groups will incorporate social time into their sessions - this could be as simple as supper and a chat before or after.

Sacraments: At the heart of our faith are the sacraments. Therefore going to Mass as a group is important for strengthening and supporting your youth group members spiritually. Many youth groups meet after a weekend parish mass or organise a regular Youth Mass. Youth Masses are a good witness to the rest of the parish of the work you are doing.



Seven: When and how often should the group meet?

It is best to discuss as a group how often you will meet. Depending on the age range, some group members might be busy with work or school and therefore are not able to attend meetings at all times. It is best to find a suitable day and time and stick to it for a few meetings to see how the group responds. It is advisable that the group meets on a regular basis, varying from either once a week to

once every fortnight to once every month so that people know to set aside that specific time. It could even be something like the first and third Friday of the month.

If the meetings are too far apart (especially if you plan on doing several activities), be careful that you do not become too over-committed or people may lose interest.

Eight: How can you promote the youth group to the rest of the parish community?

Before you go promoting your group you should pick a name. This should be done in one of the initial meetings and agreed upon by the group. Once that is sorted, promoting the group can really help it grow in its early stages. Make sure that you don't start up a Facebook group or blog and let it slide. Keep your information up-to-date and regular. Two important factors to consider when promoting is how and where, so try brainstorming with your core group and allocate this task to someone. Here are a few ideas we came up with:

How — Will you use the parish bulletin/newsletter? Facebook? Run a pizza and games night? Speak at your parish masses? Invite a friend? Write a song or use posters?

Where — Will you promote strictly within the parish? Or at a local school? A sporting club? Hold a BBQ in a local park?





Nine: Who else could be involved?

It is important to think about whom else could be involved in the starting and supporting of your youth group. It could be beneficial to have either your Parish Priest or Assistant Parish Priest involved. There may be other religious brothers and sisters in your parish who would be happy to be a part of the parish youth group. You could even consider a senior member of the parish or a married couple who have had experience in youth ministry or have a keen passion for youth involvement. These people will be a great source of support to the youth group leaders and the youth group in general. They might help with the coordination of events and activities, provide spiritual reflections and help publicise the group to the wider parish community.





Ten: How can you ensure the longevity of your youth group?

It takes a lot of energy and enthusiasm to kick off a youth group but once those foundation members get a little older or move on, how do you keep the group running? One of the key factors in the longevity of a group is mentoring. By planning ahead, you can avoid a short lifespan and ensure many years of reward.

You, as one of the founders of the group, will likely have a very hands-on roll as the group starts up, but it is not possible for you to do everything and you should not have to. Providing a mentoring role to up-and-coming leaders will not only help you in delegating responsibilities, but will also give others the training and confidence to be leaders in the future. After a few sessions with the group, you will most likely be able to identify those in the group who express leadership qualities – as well as those who you think have the capability to become leaders in the future.

An example of mentoring could involve some short one-on-one time with potential leaders. It could be a regular 15 to 30 minute sit down in a café where you ask them about their experience and role in the group. One way to encourage leadership is to assign particular tasks at each meeting to specific members of the group. Then before the next meeting, contact them to check on their preparations and offer assistance. It is important that all the tasks are not burdened to one person and your core members do not suffer from burn out.

Important points:

- Mentoring is to help the new members develop their skills as a leader or member of the group. It is not a time for personal counselling or spiritual direction.

Personal counselling or spiritual direction is better referred to the Parish Priest.

- As a leader, you should be mentoring no more than 2-4 young people. Mentoring is time consuming but plays a pivotal role in helping young people grow in the use of their gifts and faith.
- Thinking ahead and preparation is of vital importance. When your group is considering undertaking a new activity (eg joining a soup van, running catechesis for younger children) then someone needs to have sourced the information first. Understand exactly what the commitment will involve and ensure you do not stretch the group too far.
- Recruitment is the key to keeping the group healthy. One of the main reasons to start a Youth Group is to share Christ's love. By making a conscious effort to recruit new members, (this could be yearly or an ongoing activity) through an information night or a retreat, you can enable the group to continue strongly for many years to come. Not to mention how amazingly rewarding the new friendships can be.
- A health check is also often required. Now and then it is important to stop and review how the group is going. Have you lost sight of your goals? Do you need to reset goals? Have you strayed away from fulfilling the five elements? Is your group losing balance and stability? Having a session to discuss your group and its goals is important in keeping it healthy. You could even include this in a retreat day or weekend!
- Even as you take on leadership, you should be thinking about your successor. The future of the group relies on strong and inspired youth.



The next step

We've had a chat to a couple of Youth Groups and asked them some of the keys to their success, here is what they had to say:

Flame Youth Group, Keilor Downs

What age group? 16-35 years – broad age group to encompass all!

What do you do? We start with food to welcome. When the group first began, the assistant Priest of our Parish came in and led a bible studies group which provided the foundation for lighter discussion. Now we play faith-based games, have discussions on scripture, guest speakers and of course, praise and worship sessions.

What are the challenges that you have faced? There are so many in youth ministry... the two biggest challengers are maintaining and increasing numbers and finding the right people for music ministry.

What are some of the highlights? In most recent times, our core members were touched by the Holy Spirit and were inspired to grow in their belief and evangelize.

What has been the key to your on-going success as a group? For us there have been a few: Flame first – priority for God, then to pray strongly and even when the attendance is low – never to give up!

Do you have a succession plan? Not really, we take it one day at a time. We rely on Flame Fest as a form of new beginnings – to inspire others and evangelize.





The next step

SPC Youth Group, Deer Park

What age group? The SPC Youth Group welcomes anyone aged from Year 7 and above.

What do you do? SPC Youth Group runs from 7pm until 9pm each Monday evening. We usually commence with half an hour of games and activities and then move into a time of prayer with praise and worship and we pray the Rosary together each week. The final hour of the night varies week to week – youth leaders alternate every five weeks and organise discussions, talks, skits, guest speakers, Adoration evenings and games night just to name a few!

What are the challenges that you have faced? One of the challenges faced by the youth group centre around engaging a wide age-range of youth who have varied levels of faith-formation and ensuring that through a limited time frame of two hours every week we are helping to lead the youth closer to Christ.

Also, faith formation for the leadership team is a challenge. Ensuring that the youth leaders are themselves receiving and developing their own faith in order to help them give back to the youth is something that we are continuing to work on – many of the AOY programs have helped with this!

What are some of the highlights? WYD 2008! This was definitely one of the highlights that stand out for the group – many young people of the parish and surrounding parishes had profound faith experiences at WYD 2008 and its fruits are still reaping in the youth group today.

Our yearly camps have also helped in developing stronger friendships within the group, and also have helped the youth encounter and grow in relationship with Jesus, especially through the sacrament of Reconciliation and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Engaging and developing networks with other youth groups has especially helped those who are part of the leadership team to grow in faith and understanding of what it means to be 'one, holy Catholic Church'.

What has been the key to your on-going success as a group? Prayer and persistence! Although we've faced some challenges over the years, persevering when numbers have been low or when times feel spiritually 'dry' and having the trust that God is there with us, guiding us on our way in growing in deeper relationship with Christ has helped keep the group running. Many of the youth leaders, past and present, would also agree that in having the constant of praying to our Blessed Mother Mary through the Holy Rosary, almost every week over the lifetime of the group is a testament to her motherly intercession and guidance of us all towards Christ.

Do you have a succession plan? How do you ensure the longevity of the group? While we don't have a formal succession plan, we are mindful in inviting young people to take a leap of faith and step into a leadership position. We are blessed in having a large and enthusiastic leadership team with a variety of ages and experiences who all help one another encounter Jesus. We trust that the Holy Spirit will guide the leadership team to further strengthen the faith and inspire the young people so that we are witnesses to God's love on earth such that this can be the fuel that continues to drive the youth group for many more years to come.



And finally!



You have finished! Well really you have only just started so congratulations! This journey will be one of many ups and downs but ultimately rewarding. A well run youth group will bring new life to all those involved, so we commend you for taking up the challenge.

We believe that you are doing God's work - and hope that you place your trust and faith in Him. Don't forget to pray for your group and ask your parish to do the same.

We would love to know about your newly formed youth group and help you get the word out through our website! So please let us at the AOY know and we will happily support you in whatever ways we can!

Good luck and blessings from the AOY.



Appendix 1.1: Other forms of youth ministry

This is just a brief rundown of four existing movements and organisations. There are many more around. Check out our website for even more: www.cam.org.au/youth and look under our “Get involved”.

Antioch

History: Antioch began in the USA in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was a program developed for University students. It was brought to Sydney Australia in 1981 and now has groups not only Australia-wide but across the world.

Aims: To help our youth develop a love of Jesus and of His Church through an experience of community - a community where they are always welcome and where they can find a relevant and supportive environment.

What is it? Antioch is a youth-to-youth ministry where young people aged approx. 16-25 years gather to share a reflection, sing songs, discuss and pray together. A set of guidelines helps with the running of the group and adult support assists in the managing of the group. It is a spiritual program that begins with a weekend experience and has a strong (generally) weekly follow-up. It offers youth an ongoing opportunity to listen, discuss and better understand what it means to be a Catholic today.

Contact: Ron & Mavis Pirola are the Australian heads of Antioch tel: 02 9349 1710 or info@antioch.com.au.

Website: <http://antioch.thepmrc.org/>

Life Teen

History: Began in Arizona, USA in 1985 and believes that “Eucharist-based ministry has the power to transform teens, transform parishes, and transform culture.” It has expanded to include programs for all high school aged children as well as a support program for parents.

Aims: Focuses on seven core values centred on the first value which is Eucharistic Spirituality. The focus of the group is liturgy and in particular, the Eucharist. The other values are love, joy, affirmation, authenticity, evangelization and primary vocation.

What is it? Life Teen focuses on the Youth Mass by producing a welcoming atmosphere, reverent and relevant music and engaging homilies. It also has what is known as Life Nights which is a Sunday night youth ministry evening designed to be both fun and challenging and deepen relationships with God.

Contact: Currently in Mill Park, contact Arnie: 4907 3179

Website: <http://lifeteen.com/>

St Vincent de Paul

History: Started in Paris in 1833, Bl Frederic Ozanam, at the age of just 20, established the St Vincent de Paul Society. At this time, the people of France were experiencing tremendous political and social upheaval: changes of government, the Industrial Revolution and unjust employment practices. Ozanam gathered some colleagues and began to respond in practical ways to the poverty and hardship he saw in the lives of people around him. They visited people in their homes and offered friendship and support. The group formed by Ozanam and his friends later became known as the first ‘conference’ of the St Vincent de Paul Society. They met together regularly as a group for prayer and mutual support, to learn and to share ideas about how they could best assist others.



Appendix 1.1: Other forms of youth ministry

Aims: The Society is a lay Catholic organisation that aspires to live the gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy and by working to shape a more just and compassionate society. They offer “a hand up” to people in need. They do this by respecting their dignity, sharing our hope and encouraging them to take control of their own destiny.

What is it? The Society has a range of groups. There are College Conferences that can be setup through High Schools and cater for years 7-12, Mini-Vinnies which is for Primary School aged children and Young Adult Conference which target 18-35 year olds. The three youth arms of the Society often serve different purposes. All start with prayer and reflection and retain their Catholic values.

Mini-Vinnies: Promotes social awareness in children via “see, think and do”. Children are encouraged to become aware of differences in the world, also to think and talk about issues in the world and offers action through community service and fundraising. This method has been adapted from the Cardijn method of See, Judge, Act.

College Conferences: Usually meet at lunchtimes or after school to plan fundraising and other activities to help their local community. Some school groups may also be involved in a soup-van and promoting social justice in their school environment.

Young Adult Conferences: Young Adult Conferences are conducted much like a Senior Conference. They meet regularly and plan works such as: Kids Days Out, Kids Camps, Soup Van, Home Visitation, Tutoring and more.

Contact: Youth Office on 9895 5800 or email: info@svdp-vic.org.au

Website: www.vinnies.org.au/who-we-are-national?link=758

Young Christian Workers (YCW) movement

History: Started by Cardinal Joseph Cardijn in 1925. It was started as a movement to encourage fair conditions, rights and protection for young Christian workers.

Aims: To uphold the three truths: The Truth of Faith (each young worker is unique and irreplaceable and has dignity because they are created in the image of god. They have a personal mission to change the world. The Truth of Experience: The way young workers are treated is often in contradiction to their God-given dignity. The Truth of Method: The YCW is a mass movement for by and with young workers to serve, educate and represent them using the famous method of see, judge and act.

What is it? Regular meetings are held build a community and to pray, reflect and also create and follow through on a need or action found in today's world. When the YCW looks into issues they use See (What is happening, Why is it happening, What is it doing to people?), Judge (What do I think about this? Why do I think should be happening, What does my faith say?) and Act (What do I want to change in the long-term? What will I do now – in the short term? Whom can I involve?) to guide their actions.

Contact: Bridget Flood (Melbourne YCW Diocesan Coordinator) - 0421 787 117 / bridget.flood@ycw.org.au

Website: www.ycw.org.au/



Appendix 1.1: Other forms of youth ministry

YEP (Youth Engagement Project)

History: The Youth Engagement Project (YEP) is the direct result of what happens when people see a need in the community and decide to do something about it. In 2010, parents of students who had recently graduated the local high school approached the Parish Priest at Hawthorn with the concern that, while there was support and formation for students at the local high schools, once people left, there was nothing being done to engage them in church and the young people were largely on their own.

Aims: Today, YEP exists as a joint venture of the Kew, Hawthorn, Deepdene and Balwyn parishes with Genazzano FCJ College and Xavier College. It aims to be a continuous source of formation and presence for youth, during and beyond school, in the areas of:

- Prayer and Worship
- Community Life
- Service and Justice
- Personal and Spiritual Formation
- Leadership Development
- Pastoral Care

With the ultimate goal being to empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ, and to invite them into responsible participation in the life, mission and work of the Church both within and beyond their local community.

To do this YEP takes an active role in the spiritual journey of young people, throughout a variety of ages. The youngest contact comes at the time of confirmation where older students in YEP run a retreat for all students in the area who are making their confirmation.

This contact is maintained throughout years 7 and 8 with occasional formation and social events.

For students in years 9-12 there are 2 camps a year which are chances for intense formation over the course of a weekend and to experience community living with like minded people. For those looking for an extra challenge, YEP also has 2 solidarity experiences each year, for older students, to rural Bourke, NSW, which is another chance to experience simple, community living while engaging in service.

The constants throughout this journey are ministry opportunities through the YMCA at the Melbourne Youth Justice Centre, the developing Youth Masses which draw young people into involvement with church and monthly youth events for students in years 10-12 which are an opportunity to build relationship with other youth as well as receive spiritual and personal formation in an engaging environment. Post school, the Checkpoint evenings are a fortnightly chance for young adults to join together for prayer and a meal in community.

Contact: Paul Salmon (YEP Coordinator) - 0434 254 233 / yep@pacific.net.au



Appendix 2.1: Websites

www.studentministry.org/ten-tips-for-starting-a-church-youth-group-ministry/

An American Youth Minister and his blog on his work as a youth minister

www.sym.org.au/supporting-parishes/3.html

Has some helpful tips on Forming a Youth Ministry Team from the Sandhurst Youth Ministry team

<http://youthministry.catholic.org.au/>

This site has lots of great resources from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

www.csyma.com

Catholic Schools Youth Ministry Australia is a support network for all those involved in school-based youth ministry from teachers to youth ministry teams.

http://web.me.com/batman760/YM_Central/Home.html

YM Central is a Youth Ministry resource for Catholics. Most resources are for sale only but a good reference site.

www.cultivationministries.com/

Cultivation ministries wrote *Growing Teen Disciples*, a youth ministry program with solid theology, brilliant theory, clear strategy, practical suggestions, and real-life stories that provide direction for building a youth ministry.

www.cmdnet.org/

An American site using the US Bishops' document *Renewing the Vision*.

www.greatadventureonline.com

A US bible students website with a range of free downloads for fun activities.

www.thesource4ym.com/

This website lists over 100 film titles, providing analyses on the film's themes and values, just note that there are other resources on this website that are handy to use, but be mindful that its contributors are not necessarily writing from a Catholic perspective, and therefore may differ slightly on some topics.



Appendix 3.1: References

Anointed and Sent: An Australian Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry – (2009) sample available online at: <http://youthministry.catholic.org.au/national-vision/foreward.html> or for purchase as full version.

Reaching out to young parishioners (Published: 18 March 2012) Selina Venier – online at: http://www.catholicleader.com.au/news.php/features/reaching-out-to-young-parishioners_78791