



Vicariate for Youth Ministry & Pastoral Care, Diocese of Brentwood

AN ACCOMPANIMENT TO:

# EMPLOYING A PARISH PARTNERSHIP YOUTH CO-ORDINATOR

A reflection and discussion pamphlet  
on re-imagining Youth Ministry in  
your parish after the pandemic

# RE-IMAGINING YOUTH MINISTRY IN YOUR PARISH AFTER THE PANDEMIC

This pamphlet is intended as a preview to the fuller document, "Employing a Parish Partnership Youth Co-ordinator." Before diving into the longer document, take time with this one. Gather a few people – youth leaders, catechists, and your parish priest. Take time to read each section of the document, and consider the questions together.

In the introduction to the longer document, Bishop Alan writes:

As we move beyond the pandemic, we can see that our young people need us, the Church, more than ever. In *Christus Vivit* Pope Francis says, **"the community should feel collectively responsible for accepting, motivating, encouraging and challenging young people ... regarding them with understanding, appreciation and affection"** (CV243).

Just rest with those highlighted words for a moment. Each one of them matters. Bring each word to prayer: Accept. Motivate. Encourage. Challenge. Understand. Appreciate. Regard with Affection.

Take time, now, in your group to have a conversation about these words. Which one resonates most deeply for you? Which one challenges you the most? And a little tip – don't let this discussion drift in to the specifics of youth opportunities in the parish – there will be another time for that conversation. This moment is about sharing your heart for youth ministry, and listen to what inspires and challenges those around you.

The two main sections in this pamphlet offer two ways to reflect on Youth Ministry in your Parish Partnership. Firstly, Pope Francis' vision of accompaniment of young people, and secondly, that you are not in this journey alone, the Director of Youth Ministry and the Vicariate for Youth Ministry and Pastoral Care will be with you throughout the process.

Now, in autumn 2021, there is particular value in revisiting Pope Francis' message to young people and our call to accompany them on their journey of faith.

There was great providence in the timing of the Synod on Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment which took place in Rome in October 2018; precisely the same period we began developing this vital step in Diocesan strategy, the employment of Parish Partnership Youth Co-ordinators. On March 25th 2019, the Feast of the Annunciation, Pope Francis released the Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit!* - "Christ is Alive!" - and this offers great insights for us.

Almost a year later, the world was brought to a standstill as we faced a global pandemic and our plans and dreams had to be put on hold. However, we are now reaching a time when we can begin to slowly and tentatively open up again, to start bringing some of those dreams back into focus. The writings of *Christus Vivit* resonate even more loudly now than they did in 2019.

At the heart of our reflection on *Christus Vivit* is a simple, yet powerful truth, "God loves you" (CV 112). This is Pope Francis' first truth to young people, they are loved by God. This is something which cannot be doubted and should never be forgotten. One way young people will know that love of God is through our witness and ministry to them.

Pope Francis focuses the direction for all our Youth Ministry on the person of Jesus Christ. He quotes Pope Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est* ("God is love"): "Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction." (CV129). Pope Francis writes powerfully of the need both to empower young people within the Church, and to consistently encourage them to deepen a relationship with Christ which is a true and profound friendship.

Pope Francis regularly affirms those who accompany the young: "Particular gratitude is due for the generous commitment of countless lay persons, priests, consecrated men and women, and bishops, who daily devote themselves with integrity and dedication to the service of the young. Their efforts are like a great forest that quietly grows." (CV99). Within Brentwood Diocese, these words resonate deeply; there are many quiet heroes who work alongside our young people as volunteer youth leaders and catechists, supported by priests and religious, and transforming the lives and faith journeys of thousands of young people every year.

Christus Vivit calls us to look with fresh eyes at the nature of our Youth Ministry. Pope Francis is very direct when he says, "I want to state clearly that young people themselves are agents of youth ministry. Certainly they need to be helped and guided, but at the same time left free to develop new approaches, with creativity and a certain audacity." (CV203). Within the Brentwood Catholic Youth Service we try to encourage, support and form young leaders in every part of our ministry, whether the Walsingham House at Abbotswick Team, young musicians at the monthly Youth Mass, or the 70+ youth leaders who lead in Lourdes each summer. This undoubtedly brings its own challenges, but when young people are empowered in leadership they both shine and surprise us – and they constantly find new ways of bringing faith alive.

Pastoral care for the young, and the evangelisation of the young, is a task for the whole community (CV202) and the most important thing that we can do is to "accompany and encourage" the young (CV230) in ways that show them that they are utterly beloved by God: "At every moment, you are infinitely loved" (CV112).

Therefore those who accompany the young must, at times, give them the space to walk in the "wrong direction" – the story of the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) is a thread which runs through the Synod reflections, and suggests that the guiding qualities for our Youth Ministry should be that it is "gradual, respectful, patient, hopeful, tireless and compassionate" (CV236). These qualities should be lived together with the joyful transmission of the kerygma – the essential truths of our faith, summarised by Pope Francis as "Jesus Christ loves you. He gave his life to save you. And now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you." Taken together, all of this surely gives us an excellent understanding of what we are looking for in the Parish Partnership Youth Co-ordinators.

Christus Vivit! shines with insight for us, and this brief introduction can only give a small taste of its richness and joy; it would be well worth those who are most closely involved in the appointment of the Parish Partnership Youth Co-ordinator having a look at the whole document.

Above all, it is the person of Jesus Christ which infuses Christus Vivit. The encounter with Christ is our dream for the young, and gives us the key focus for our employment of Parish Partnership Youth Co-ordinators, who can provide a greater range and depth of opportunities for our young people, precisely to enable such an encounter. In this way Youth Ministry – and the whole of parish life – in our Diocese of Brentwood can be ever more enlivened by the opening words of Christus Vivit: "Christ is alive! He is our hope, and in a wonderful way he brings youth to our world... Christ is alive and he wants you to be alive!"

Take a moment to reflect on what you have just read. Perhaps you have read the whole of *Christus Vivit*, or perhaps this is the first time you have heard of it. Most certainly it is well worth reading it all.

For now, in your group, please share:

- What word, quote, or phrase most resonated with you? Why?
- What do you think it means to accompany young people. Reflect especially on CV203:

"I want to state clearly that young people themselves are agents of youth ministry. Certainly they need to be helped and guided, but at the same time left free to develop new approaches, with creativity and a certain audacity." What do you think that means for Youth Ministry and Catechesis? How much, if at all, are young people involved in leadership in your parish?



At the conclusion of his introduction to the main document, Bishop Alan reiterates words were first written as part of the Diocesan vision in 2018:

**It is our belief that a full time, paid, trained and well-supported person in the role of Youth Co-ordinator in each parish partnership is the best way to provide the resources and relationships required to sustain youth ministry in the rapidly changing landscape faced by our young people.**

This followed the responses from parishes as the Vision process began, back in 2017-18, where in every single response “provision for young people” was listed amongst the top three priorities for the Parish Partnership, and in most cases it was given as the top priority. Since then, this approach has been formally adopted as part of Diocesan strategy, and the fact that you are reading this document is part of helping parishes infuse this in their thinking, as Parish Partnership conversations restart after the pandemic.

Something that it is vital to say before you read much further is that you will not be alone in this process of appointing a Youth Co-ordinator. Part of implementing this strategy in the Diocese has been the employment of a Director of Youth Ministry for the Diocese. Within this role is the commitment that the Director will walk this journey with each Parish Partnership, as and when you are ready for it, offering the full support of the Vicariate for Youth Ministry & Pastoral Care. This is a big commitment for our Partnerships and so we will assist you in every step along the way.

### **But why do it? Why make such a commitment?**

In *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis places accompaniment at the centre of youth ministry and catechesis. There is now an even greater need to accompany the young, particularly as we begin to move, God willing, into more stable times. Accompaniment is rarely a straightforward journey, but it is undoubtedly a life changing one, not only for the young person but also for those who have the privilege and joy of walking with them. **Young people bring light to our Church.** They want to ask questions and discern the meaning of their life and faith. They look for ways to serve others, particularly those most in need and have a thirst for justice. They bring an energy and enthusiasm to what they do, and welcome the chance to explore life's bigger questions. We can help them on this journey and in turn they can help us, as adults, learn more about and deepen our own faith.

While our young people are amazing, it does not mean that the journey with them is always easy. We too will face challenges. There are so many voices calling out for

their attention, the Church and faith could easily become lost in the noise around them. We already know that many young people face struggles, from poverty to unstable homes, from stress to the need to have the perfect social media profile.

Recently, the struggles of some of our young people have become even more apparent as they have lived through the pandemic: being separated from friends and family, losing the stability and safety of school, seeing parents who are frontline workers putting their lives at risk for others, and most sadly, losing people they love to Covid-19. Life for them has been uncertain and unsettled, pressures have intensified and we find them in a new and fragile place. **Now more than ever they need someone to walk alongside them.**

There is a simple truth we need every young person to hear – **God loves you.** Simple, yet powerful words. We need to help them see that they are beloved by God, who knows every hair of their head (Luke 12:17), knit them together in their mother's womb (Psalm 139), and sees them as a masterpiece, a work of art (Ephesians 2:10). In order to help this truth to be recognised and believed we need to go beyond our Sacramental programmes – yes they are integral to the process, but they are just one part of the faith journey of young people from the ages 7-18. We need to offer a range of opportunities and activities, and build a sense of belonging that will sustain them.

Even before the pandemic we faced a stark reality, with Mass numbers falling by around 10% over the last few years and on average a parish celebrating the Sacrament of Confirmation with just 30-40% of those who were Baptised. The story was one of disengagement that has now been heightened because of the pandemic and the challenges faced in youth ministry. We are already seeing indications that the number of Mass-going Catholics will have fallen even further as we begin to come out of the pandemic. While this can look like a bleak picture, there is hope as we are given the opportunity to reimagine and rethink what youth ministry can look like within our Parish partnerships. Think and answer honestly, would a dedicated PPYC make a difference?

As we restart the process around our Parish Partnerships, it is not necessarily about returning to what we had pre-pandemic. Instead we have an opportunity to shape something new and exciting as we spread the Good News of Jesus Christ in Essex and East London. **For young people, this means investment in the years between and beyond Sacramental programmes, in ways which both deepen their Catholic faith and enhance their sense of belonging to parish communities where they know they are seen as precious and cherished, where they are listened to and have a voice into the activities and opportunities offered for them.**

To employ a Youth Co-ordinator for your Parish Partnership therefore matters very deeply. A Youth Co-ordinator will, God willing, help in the renewal of parish life, and the development of the next generation, in ways that are precious and lasting. This – it should be emphasised – in no way diminishes the vital role of parish volunteers. Rather, it recognises the fact that any volunteer is likely to also be juggling work and



family responsibilities, and is unlikely to be able to commit 35 hours a week. It is also an enormous encouragement to volunteers leading Sacramental programmes to see a pathway for their young people; no First Holy Communion or Confirmation catechist wants to see young people dropping away at the end of the programme.

**The distinctive, unique and invaluable contribution of a Parish Partnership Youth Co-ordinator is that they will have the time and expertise to ensure ongoing opportunities for young people, including nurturing young leaders within the parish.**

We understand very well that for the last fifteen months keeping churches open and safe has been a primary focus, as well as serving the bereaved, ill and vulnerable. It has been exhausting, for many, and to rebuild communities after the pandemic will also be a difficult and delicate task. Within it, through everything offered in this little pamphlet, and in the fuller document, we encourage you to ensure that provision for the youth is a central strand in your plans. The process can begin with simple steps of exploring how we want our communities to be in a year or two years down the line, and the place of young people in the parish. Taking time with the questions in this pamphlet gives you the opportunity to begin to explore these possibilities further.

When you are ready, the full version of this document will give you thorough guidance in the steps you will need to take to employ a Parish Partnership Youth Co-ordinator. The Director of Youth Ministry for the Diocese will help you with this process, from the early stages of planning, to preparing Job Descriptions, right through the recruitment and interview process. Once Youth Co-ordinators are in place, the Director of Youth Ministry will continue to help resource and mentor them in the years ahead, supported by the Vicariate for Youth Ministry and Pastoral Care and making full use of the Brentwood Catholic Youth Service and Walsingham House at Abbotswick.

Thank you for the time and care you are giving to Youth Ministry in your parish – just by reading this far it is clear you have a heart for young people. Please keep us in your prayers, as we pray for you, and please feel welcome to get in touch at any time using the contact details on the back page.

– Claire Bailey and Fr Dominic Howarth, June 2021.





### **Discussion questions:**

**Now that you have read both some of the thinking from *Christus Vivit*, and some of the ideas behind employing a Parish Partnership Youth Co-ordinator, take time with these questions**

- What provision was there (pre-pandemic) for young people in our parish?
- What was most positive about this? What were the challenges?
- How has the pandemic impacted on our parish? Particularly with regards to the youth.
- How could we best provide for young people between Holy Communion and Confirmation? What could we do to help them sustain and deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ? If there are already activities for this age group that are restarting after the pandemic, what is the balance of spiritual and social activities?
- How do we provide for young people post-Confirmation? How do we help them into an adult understanding of their faith, help form them as young leaders, and involve them in serving the parish and local community?
- In what ways would we like to see our young people more involved in the parish community?
- How do we use opportunities beyond the partnership such as retreats at Walsingham House, events run by the BCYS or national events such as Flame? Do young people in the parish travel to Lourdes? Is there an opportunity for them to speak to the parish about their experience? Who helps them prepare such a talk?

As you conclude this discussion about what already exists in the parish, and what could be, are you spotting where and how a Parish Partnership Youth Co-ordinator could bring this to life? Who could be the ones to help the Partnership take the next steps, towards designing a Job Description, Recruitment and Employment? This is the moment to:

- Identify who in the parish partnership will take the lead on this
- Contacting the Director of Youth Ministry, Claire Bailey, so that she can walk the next steps with you.

When your discussion is concluded, we encourage you to finish your time together with this prayer, composed from words Pope Francis has spoken to young people:

*Dear Lord,  
Inspire our young people to be revolutionaries,  
to swim against the tide of a culture that sees  
everything as temporary.  
Walk with them as they discover your eternal truths of  
love, hope, joy, forgiveness and mercy.  
Affirm them in their great gifts;  
Encourage them to dare to dream of great things.  
Show them the beauty of encountering you in prayer,  
and in reading the Bible.  
Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus  
may they know the wonder of your voice igniting their  
hearts.  
Support them as they meet you in the faces  
of their sisters and brothers,  
especially those who are most forgotten,  
those at the margins and the edges.  
Amen*



## LEAP OF FAITH

(Youth Gather 2019,  
Essex Outdoors Mersea Island)



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