

ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST

“I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full.”¹

From the outset Jesus was explicit in his invitation to the disciples to follow him and to share in his life. His promise to them (and to us) is “life to the full”. His example of meeting people where they are, calling them to belief and leading them to encounter him is as relevant and alive as it was 2000 years ago. The process may vary, yet the journey that leads a person to Christ will always comprise a number of elements: ²

- Proclamation of the Word
- Acceptance of the Gospel entailing conversion
- Profession of Faith
- Baptism
- The outpouring of the Holy Spirit
- Admission to Eucharistic Communion

We recognise The Church as the Body of Christ on earth, the Community of Faith, where people gather to hear and break open the Word and to share in the Eucharist. Each member is called to encounter Christ and to enter into relationship with him. Guided by the Holy Spirit this relationship will grow, gifts are used in service and each member of the body of Christ is open to renewal and transformation.

Evangelisation

The call to evangelisation is not an optional extra; it is addressed to the whole community. Each member of the Church (through their Baptism) shares in this privilege, not only to encounter Jesus but to witness to his life, death and resurrection and make a difference to the world in which they live.³ In this call to discipleship, it is imperative to remember that “evangelisation loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs, their symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life.”⁴

The whole parish community has a responsibility to minister to and serve not only young people, but also one another. This approach infuses youth ministry into parish life by means of welcome, catechesis, celebration, support, witness and acceptance and significantly provides a place where each member of the Body of Christ not only actively belongs but is continually being formed, enabling mission and the use of their gifts. “The first means of evangelisation is the witness of an authentically Christian life”⁵ and much of the work of the Youth Service is based on the experience of spending time with people who are firmly grounded in faith and who, because of their age, formation, life of prayer and commitment, will be especially able to offer young people the invitation to encounter Christ and to

accompany them on their journey.⁶

Signs of the Times...

The Church is always called to “read the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel⁷ and the pressures of modern society can render the Church and the Gospel message counter-cultural in impact. It is evident that in today’s society many – especially young people, seek meaning, authenticity and a sense of purpose and value. They also face a multiplicity of possibilities in their lives and the challenge of values that are often contrary to the Gospel. “Often young people do not see in the Church the object of their search or the place where their questions are answered and their expectations fulfilled.”⁸ It is within this context that the Church has to respond.

Southwark Catholic Youth Service

The Youth Service undertakes a vital task of evangelisation with enthusiasm and consistency for our young people. The work of the Youth Service at St Vincent’s Centre and in outreach to parishes and schools offers an experience of community and an encounter with people of faith. Fundamental to youth ministry is the development of relationships with young people – personal contact and a holistic approach should not be underestimated, “As we hand on the Catholic Christian tradition and discern the activity of God in the contemporary pluralistic and secular world and in young people’s own experience, we invite them to find a vocabulary to articulate their beliefs, to examine it and to own it. We invite them to critically reflect upon their own experience and to allow the wisdom of Scriptures and tradition to inform and transform their lives.”⁹

At St. Vincent’s Centre, the Youth Service will provide an experience of a Catholic community, based on mutual trust and respect arising from a lived experience of the Gospel. This experience will be achieved in a number of ways:

- Through the experience of Prayer.
- Through the celebration of the Liturgy, especially the Eucharist
- Through the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation
- Through the experience of peer ministry
- Through the development of a spirituality appropriate to the age of the young people concerned
- Through the experience of living in community, sharing in meal times and in recreation
- Through the programme that is provided for the group

The Youth Service, through consultation, will provide training, support resources and on-going formation to those working with young people. This will not be confined to one model, but will reflect the needs, culture, geography and traditions encompassed within the parishes. This work will not take place in isolation, but together with the schools, parishes, deaneries and agencies we will

encourage young peoples involvement and continuing formation. This work will be underpinned by the principles of the Gospel whilst focusing on the continuing mission of the Church to bring all people together in encounter with Christ.

Concluding remarks

“The sheep hear his voice, one by one he calls his own sheep and leads them out.”¹⁰ Each of us is called. God desires that his voice is not only heard but that it is responded to. The intrinsic mission of Southwark Catholic Youth Service is that the young people of the Diocese (and those that work with them) will listen to this call, encounter him and know beyond all doubt that Jesus Christ is at the centre of their lives.

“Young people do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ—and you will find true life.”¹¹

1 Jn. 10:10

2 CCC, n.1229

3 “Youth must not simply be considered as an object of pastoral concern for the Church: in fact young people are and ought to be encouraged to be active on behalf of the Church as leading characters in evangelisation and participants in the renewal of society.” (CL, n.46)

EN, n.63

EN, n.41

“In the Christian tradition, spirituality has been used to describe particular ways of experiencing and fostering life in Christ. It refers to the unfolding, day-by-day, of the fundamental decision to become or remain a Christian which we make at Baptism, repeat at Confirmation, and renew each time we receive the Eucharist.” (Rausch, p.176)

GS, n.4

IVT, n.11b

CAC, n.23

Jn. 10:3

11 Pope Benedict XVI

Notes

CAC	The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CL	<i>Christifideles Laici</i>
EN	<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i>
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i>
IVT	<i>In Verbo Tuo</i>
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i>

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