



**Diocese of Gary
Diocesan Youth Council**

Statement on Youth Evangelization



Foreword

On January 13-14, high school-aged teens that comprise the Diocese of Gary Diocesan Youth Council gathered for a Seminar on Evangelization. The premise: assist Bishop Dale Melczek, Pastors, Priests, and all church leaders in their efforts to reach out to young people.

The project began with a conversation I had with Bishop Melczek about a pattern of responses from the parish-centered *Future Full of Hope* project, conducted in 2006. Many parishes identified an overall lack of youth involvement, not only in mass attendance but in other areas of parish life as well. His suggestion: bring the topic to those who *are* involved—the Diocesan Youth Council—and ask for their feedback. The seminar was born.

The young people that assisted in formulating this statement represent an extraordinary group of church leaders, and they acknowledge that they have a responsibility to themselves reach out to their peers, and also ask that their parishes create youth-friendly environments to assist in bringing other youth to Christ.

The seminar was held at the Spiritual Life Center in Hammond and facilitated by the Executive Director of Cultivation Ministries, Frank Mercadante, a highly-regarded author and speaker on the topic of youth evangelization. Mercadante has authored such books as *Disciples in Mission: Small Group Leaders Guide for Teens*, *Growing Teen Disciples: Strategies for Really Effective Youth Ministry*, and *Positively Dangerous: Live Loud, Be Real, Change the World*.

The statement you will read was written by the Diocesan Youth Council, and consists of four key areas in which evangelization can impact their world: **youth ministry, family, leadership, and parish life**. These young people were entrusted with a task, and used their Christian leadership skills to produce this statement. This project affirms my belief—and hopefully yours, too—that youth are ready *now* to assume leadership roles in the life, mission, and work of the faith community. The passion these young people demonstrated during this project was inspiring and renewed my faith in Catholic youth ministry!

I encourage you to spend time with these results: allow your Parish Pastoral Councils and Parish Life Commissions to examine them. I also invite and welcome your feedback as we work together to build vibrant, intergenerational parishes for years to come.

Blessings in Christ's Ministry

Kevin J. Driscoll

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Statement on Youth Evangelization

Diocese of Gary Diocesan Youth Council · January, 2007

We, the Diocese of Gary Diocesan Youth Council, a representative body of high school-aged leaders from parishes throughout the diocese, are honored to present to church leaders this statement on Youth Evangelization.

The document is divided into four key areas in which we bring Christ to others: youth ministry, families, our leadership roles, and in our parishes. We invite parish leaders to use this list as a tool to assist in reaching out to young people in your churches.

*Respectfully,
The Diocesan Youth Council, January, 2007*

-Youth Ministry-

Youth ministry is where we encounter God. When we discussed why those who participate in youth ministry (youth groups, etc.) do so, almost all of us listed a welcoming, structured environment in which we feel like we belong, like a family. The best youth ministry programs have a welcoming, energetic, and structured environment, one in which we feel comfortable opening up, expressing our beliefs and thoughts, and to share the struggles and issues we face. We agree that youth ministry should be part of a faith-filled community, all working toward a common goal. We also feel that youth should be involved in the planning of the ministry, that leaders should not be afraid to “go deep” in dealing with spirituality, and should be willing to adapt to changing situations.

Notes & Suggestions...

- The best programs create strong bonds and community.
- Programs should combine large group and small group activities.
- Programs must be energetic, positive, and joyful!
- We like the thought of having our own place to gather: youth room, etc.
- Advice for youth ministers: be yourself!
- Have a vision of what you’re working toward.



-Family-

We believe that youth involvement in church begins at home: that youth with parents and families that aren't afraid to express their church beliefs are more likely to get involved. Religious beliefs are instilled from parents first, before priests, religious education, youth ministry, etc. If our parents want us involved in church, we should see them involved too, not just at mass, but also involved in other programs. The church should promote family unity, and praying as a family should be encouraged.

Notes & Suggestions...

- There should be more programs that involve the entire family.
- We should reach out to families who don't participate.
- Perhaps the church could offer counseling for parents on raising faithful teens, or in dealing with teens facing difficult issues, etc.



-Leadership-

For youth evangelization to happen there must be a commitment from both youth and adult leaders in the parish. Youth and adults must be able to trust one another, communicate effectively and be working toward common goals (see Youth Ministry). Adult leaders in the church should adopt an "open door policy" toward youth, recognizing that we have unique qualities, which shows an openness to the Holy Spirit. We need our adult leaders to be our advocates, coming from a great spirit of passion for Jesus Christ. Youth leaders also have a responsibility to minister to their peers, by setting an example of a strong faith for others.

Notes & Suggestions...

- Youth leaders can provide emotional support and prayers for their peers.
- We identified these characteristics that define effective Christian leaders: kindness, creativity, willingness to share unique gifts, passionate, motivational, enthusiastic, interested, effective communication skills, commitment, compassion, moral, integrity, prayerful.
- Both adult and youth leaders owe it to one another to not pre-judge, and should get to know each other on a personal level.
- Adults should support youth in non-church activities.
- Effective leaders are always trying out new ideas, should use a variety of approaches to reach youth.
- Adults should allow youth to lead, including coming up with new ideas.
- Parishes should offer formation/training in Christian leadership skills.
- Youth involvement should not be perceived as a "requirement" (e.g. Confirmation preparation, etc.).
- Adults should believe in us.



-Parish Life-

We believe that young people generally know that the church is concerned about our spiritual formation, and that adults are there to help us, but we also need to know why. Youth need to know they are needed and wanted in the community, and that they have a part. Capture our hearts and don't force it. We want to feel that we're all in this together, and we, too want a better parish community.

Notes & Suggestions...

- We identified these characteristics that define better liturgies: welcoming, positive, upbeat, encouraging, engaging, good music, convenient, joyful, addresses issues facing young people.
- Sometimes it's hard to see church as relevant. Help "personalize" it for us, showing how to apply the readings, teachings, etc. in our lives and the issues facing us today.
- We are open to things like Scripture study, helping us to relate Christ to today (see above).
- We embrace opportunities to serve others, and service projects should be offered beyond Confirmation.
- Parishes should not "give up" after Confirmation; many of us want to get more involved but there is not much offered.
- Sometimes when teens do not participate in church activities, it's not because they don't want to; adult leaders should understand that youth have other responsibilities and activities outside of church (schoolwork, extracurricular activities, jobs, etc.).
- We feel support when we see other youth get involved in other areas besides youth ministry, like Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Lectors, and Parish Pastoral Council leaders.
- We want to feel that priests support us and care about us.
- We want to feel that the church needs us.



***Let no one have contempt for your youth,
but set an example for those who believe,
in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity.***

~ 1 Timothy 4:12

Notes

Acknowledgements...

Thank you to all who somehow assisted in making this project a reality, including, but not limited to:

- **Most Reverend Dale J. Melczek**, the inspiration for this project.
- All who contributed to *Future Full of Hope*, and who continue to work for more vibrant, effective parishes!
- **Frank Mercadante**, seminar facilitator, Cultivation Ministries, a collaborating member of the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry
- **Carole Sluce**, Youth Ministry Coordinator, Our Lady of Consolation
- **Pamela Williams**, volunteer, Diocese of Gary OYYA
- **Lisa Driscoll**, kitchen coordinator for seminar
- Staff, Spiritual Life Center, Hammond
- *Northwest Indiana Catholic, Post-Tribune, Times*, for covering this story, and showing the world the good things that these teens can do!
- The parents, guardians, and family members of these DYC reps, for supporting their leadership commitment.
- All who support the Diocesan Catholic Services Appeal. Without you we would not have efforts like these...



Diocesan Youth Council Diocese of Gary

General Description

The Diocesan Youth Council is an advisory body to the Diocesan Office for Youth & Young Adults (OYYA). It is a group of high school-aged youth who represent the parishes and Catholic high schools in the Catholic Diocese of Gary. The members of this body will advise the Office in two ways. First, they act as a spokesperson for the needs of youth in their parishes and schools. Second, they will be an integral part of the planning and implementation of youth activities that encourage and support total youth ministry in the diocese.

The Youth Council will consist of two representatives from parishes and Catholic high schools throughout the Diocese.

Selection Process

The Pastors, Principals and Youth Ministers of each of the respective parishes and schools are asked to collaboratively select two young people to represent them on the Youth Council.

The following characteristics and qualifications will be expected from those chosen to serve on the Diocesan Youth Council.

The Members of the Diocesan Youth Council are Catholic youth of high school age who:

- are active in their parish and school
- are pursuing a growing relationship with Jesus Christ
- are committed to their beliefs
- are willing to speak on behalf of their peers
- are dedicated to leadership and Christian service
- understand and promote youth ministry

Responsibilities

- Attend all Youth Council gatherings. Each member is expected to notify the Office of Youth Ministry before the meeting if he/she cannot be present and why. If a member has more than one unexcused absence she/he may be removed from the council.
- Participate in the Youth Ministry conference offered by OYYA during the summer, as well as other diocesan events, including, but not limited to, TAPT & CYX.
- Assist in the planning and implementation of Diocesan Youth Ministry activities.
- Serve as a communicator for OYYA in spreading information about various programs throughout the year.
- Coordinate and encourage youth ministry efforts in parishes and schools.
- Meet with adult youth leaders at least once a month to discuss DYC agenda items.

Accountability

Each member of the Diocesan Youth Council is accountable to the Coordinator of the OYYA.

Benefits

- Continued leadership training
- Christian fellowship, prayer and fun
- Opportunity to minister in the Church
- A voice in Youth Ministry in the Diocese of Gary