

## **Ministering to Youth through Neighbourhood Youth Groups**

**John Barretto** (johnnybar16@gmail.com)  
Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune

### **Abstract**

Youth is a very important and crucial phase in the process of growing, where values are formed, attitudes acquired and decisions for the future taken. Youth ministry therefore is a special ministry of the church to youth, for youth, by youth and with youth, which works to foster the total growth of each young person and seeks to draw them to responsible participation in the life, mission and work of the faith community. The neighbourhood youth groups constitute a new way of being church to youth. They provide youth with communitarian, leadership, spiritual, social, economic, personal and other forms of support both within and outside the church system.

*Keywords:* Centralized, Neighbourhood, Youth, Groups, Ministry.

### **Introduction**

Youth is a transient stage of life, but it is a stage where the ideal, the authentic, the genuine, the perfect and the real fascinate the human heart. Young people are a gift from God and so are to be treasured. Because of their great numbers, gifted qualities, yearnings for creativity, justice, freedom, truth and enthusiastic hope that they represent, young people are of great importance for humanity. Today's youth constitutes not only an ever increasing percentage of the world population, particularly in India, but makes its presence felt in its search for meaning and purpose of life, and in its aspiration and vision of a just, fraternal, humane and sharing society (Arimpoor, 1982).

The Catholic Church looks upon the young as one of her greatest resources because they bring a new dynamism and a fresh approach to life, are open to new possibilities and ideas, and are willing to try out new solutions. She sees in them an image of herself called as she is, to rejuvenate herself continually. In the attitude the young display, the church sees a manifestation of the signs of the times and in the values they seek, the church discerns a movement towards a renewal of the world (CBCI Commission for Youth, 1996). In the field of youth ministry, the church has been active in a highly organized way. She has recognized youth work as part and parcel of its ministry in the world.

However, during the last few decades, the church has witnessed an upheaval in youth ministry. Much has happened recently in the church that compels one to consider different approaches to youth ministry. The life of young people with new values and new criteria for living has changed profoundly along with society and the church. The traditional settings for ministry to youth are weakened and are not much effective. Pastoral activities are constantly changing. It is not possible then to limit ourselves to our traditional praxis (Mullick, 2010). Therefore there is an urgent need today to design a new presence among the young, a new model. As society progresses, we require paradigm shifts and certainly in the way we

minister to our young people. We need to redefine youth ministry in our dioceses and parishes.

The new way of ministering to young people discussed in this article does not propose a complete rupture with what we are already doing. But it aims at organizing what we are doing, relevant to our times, our situations and especially to the needs and aspirations of our youth. A new model suggest of the new worlds to be conquered and new areas where we need to be challenged. Keeping this in mind, I embark on a quest for a new way of ministering to young people that would be the driving force for the church in India.

### **Youth Defined**

Youth is a unique stage and a significant transition period of human life. It is a special time of growth and development in one's life (Rajan, 2002). Youth is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence. That's why, as a category, youth is more fluid than other fixed age-groups. Yet, age is the easiest way to define this group, particularly in relation to education and employment.

The United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines 'youth', as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by member states. The UN Secretariat uses the term youth and young people interchangeable to mean age 15-24 with the understanding that member states and other entities use different definitions (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2003). Definition of youth perhaps changes with circumstances, especially with the changes in demographic, financial, economic and socio-cultural settings; however, the definition that uses 15-24 age cohort as youth fairly serves its statistical purposes for assessing the needs of the young people and providing guidelines for youth development.

### **The Youth Context of India**

India has often been described as the subcontinent of the young wherein majority of the population is young (Vallabaraj, 2003). 47% of India's current one billion plus population is under the age of twenty and teenagers among them number about 160 million. Out of the teenage population, some 22 million belong to the urban middle class and are in a position to influence the economy dramatically as they grow older. Another 100 million or so live in rural India (Rosario, 2010). Ours is a land of varied cultures, religious beliefs and economic distinctions and that is why Pope John Paul II said that young people were also the heirs to ancient cultures, religions and traditions (Ecclesia in Asia 6).

Indian youth are in the throes of a fast changing society. In the complex economic, political, socio-cultural multi faith context of India, the young dream of a better future and search for wealth, health, peace, happiness, liberation and fullness (Vallabaraj, 2003). Traditional value systems seem to be crumbling and long cherished ideals seem to be washed away in the swift flowing current of social change. Due to the influence and impact of the fast growing mass media, they tend to fall prey to an increasingly consumerist and materialistic society which places more importance in having rather than on being (Vallabaraj, 2003). As a result, some young people get stressed and depressed, leading to various addictions- smoking, alcohol and drugs. Communalist and fundamentalist forces are on the increase enlisting the support of the young for violent and divisive purposes (Rosario, 2010).

In a country filled with so many scandalous godmen, deception and dubious religious leaders, religion unfortunately offers them no meaning in life and rituals become fruitless and

irrational (Arimpoor, 1982). Many a times, Indian youth are victims of factors which subvert and alienate them from the mainstream of Indian society.

### **Catholic Youth**

Catholic youth are only a microscopic minority of the youth of India, and as such, they largely reflect the general characteristics of the youth of this country (CBCI Commission for Youth, 1996). They are no different in facing the challenges that are faced by youth at large. Like all other youth, catholic youth yearn to play a decisive role in every sphere of life and have become conscious of their identity and of the tremendous power they possess.

**Education** Many catholic youth complete their basic schooling; several graduate and a few complete their post-graduation. The church can boast of a nation-wide network of schools, colleges and professional institutions; however the number of catholic youth who take advantage of the opportunities for higher and professional education are few. The reasons could vary from lack of proper guidance, ambition to pursue high goals, to lack of financial stability (Rosario, 2010).

**Employment** A small section of Catholic youth from the higher classes and cities like Mumbai are equipped with the necessary skills and corner for themselves the benefits of the current process of economic liberalisation. Youth in the cities have the luxury of choice but there is a whole group of working youth who are occupied in call centres and menial jobs. On the other hand, the vast majority of the youth who live in villages and rural areas have no option but to manage with the limited income from the less productive agricultural land and are mostly caught up in poverty, illiteracy and unemployment. They are constantly engaged in a struggle to assert their self-identity and to claim their share of the benefits of development (Vallabaraj, 2003).

**Attitude towards religion** Today, a large proportion of our Catholic youth are so attracted by the materialistic and consumeristic culture, that religion fails to attract their attention. Many youngsters look with suspicion and distrust on organised religion. They feel that religion is primarily a matter of personal conviction and commitment. Young people perceive the church very differently and speak of the church as an institution which suits old people, boring in its worship and outmoded in its norms. They practice their faith in a very superficial way and only a few actively participate in the life of the church (Rajan, 2004).

Due to insufficient faith formation, many young people tend to become pious ritualists and some even experience a certain kind of disenchantment with the institutional church due to a feeling of not being wanted or recognized by church authorities who sometimes exhibit an authoritarian style of leadership (Vallabaraj, 2003).

The catholic youth situation described above brings to the fore certain challenges affecting the youth which have emerged in recent years and which urgently need to be addressed by the church. And this is where I believe the church needs to play an important role in the life of young people.

### **Church and Youth**

Youth is a very important and crucial phase in the process of growing. This period of youth is important because it is at this time that values are formed, attitudes acquired and decisions for the future taken. Christian youth therefore need a church which welcomes them to participate in the mainstream of society and community; guides them in their life choices and helps them to grow into mature and responsible adulthood.

Young people today need a church that accompanies them at all times, in all circumstances and welcomes them to participate. They look for a church that is patient and forgiving when they fail, guides them in their life choices and helps them grow into mature and responsible Christian adulthood. In other words, they deeply desire a church that is personal, loving and relevant. Therefore ministering to young people is a comprehensive effort on the part of the Catholic church to serve a broad range of the needs of the youth. It is an effort on the part of the Catholic community to welcome young people into the midst of an enriching ecclesial existence, a stance characterized by love, warmth and friendship (Diocesan Youth Centre, 1995).

### **Role of the Church in the Life of Young People**

Youth ministry is a special ministry of the church. Keeping this in mind, the church needs to rise up, become a significant and relevant voice and offer youth a true meaning of life in this world (Rajan, 2002). The church today needs to come out of its conservative slumber and look at youth with a modern perspective. She needs to portray herself as a perfect example for youth to emulate. The church needs to be an instrument to uplift modern youth towards a holistic growth. It must adopt a strategy that affects the whole personal growth of the youth.

Rather than just come across as a dispenser of grace through sacraments and right doctrines, the church should work towards establishing an environment that would allow grace the space to move and grow thereby leading the young to experience an integrated and holistic Christian life (Warren, 1978). Intensive steps need to be taken by the church to prevent youth from falling into a godless condition, thereby becoming beasts and forgetting the values of life. The church must make known that she is not only interested in the labour of youth but also very much concerned about their spiritual, moral, mental, psychological and social wellbeing in a sincere and fervent way (Dhinakaran, 2010).

The church can and should be the community, in which youth can grow, experiment and experience the complexities of life within the freedom and love of the church community. They need the kind of love that always has a listening ear and the kind of freedom that offers the space that youth need to test independence, to grow and especially to make mistakes without condemnation. What is needed is a church which has taken seriously its ministry with youth and has committed adult leaders who can see each young person as a unique human being created and loved by God (Holderness, 1981).

The church must include youth in the ministry of God as active participants. They must be empowered in the church for it helps them to develop their leadership skills and thus enhance their personality. The mission of the church will be effective and more meaningful when the church helps young people realize their dreams by providing them job opportunities, employment guidance and self-employment skills. The practical initiatives of the church must aim to make youth realize who they are and thus transform them into highly conscious self-confident men and women (Dhinakaran, 2010). Such concrete and beneficial measures of the church in her true spirit will be helpful in bringing youth closer to the church and to God. And this is why youth ministry plays a very important, vital and indispensable role in guiding and moulding young people.

### **Youth Ministry**

Youth ministry is one of the ministries of the church and therefore participates in realizing the mission of the church with youth. The mission of the church is to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, to build up a new era, a new temporal order based on gospel values. It is characterized by peace, justice, equality, freedom and love. According to Rajan (2002), "Ministry is the concrete expression of the mission and may be considered as the means of achieving the mission. Youth ministry then is the application of the church's ministry to the lives of young people. It is ministry to youth, for youth, by youth and with youth" (p.1).

Youth ministry is to youth – responding to youth's varied needs; for youth – interpreting the needs of youth; by youth – exercising their own ministry to others: peers, community, church, world; with youth- working with adults to fulfil their common responsibility for the church's mission. It means becoming church with young people, thereby actively engaging young people as disciples in the mission of Jesus and the church (Arockiaswamy, 2011). Ministry to youth works to foster the total personal, spiritual growth of each young person and seeks to draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission and work of the faith community.

Youth ministry is the community's stance of welcome toward young people, a stance characterized by gentleness and friendship (Diocesan Youth Centre – Guidelines for Parish Youth Movements, 1995). Therefore, youth ministry should not be viewed as a ministry set apart or segregated from the adults and children but that youth ministry should be the responsibility of the entire community of believers, which importantly was the mind of Jesus too.

### **Scriptural Insights Regarding Youth and Youth Ministry**

The ministry of Jesus has fascinated human minds right through the centuries. It is fascinating to note that Jesus had a soft spot for the young. A great deal of his healing ministry and his parables focussed on the young. He let the brilliant radiance of his divine compassion and concern shine on all who approached him with faith and he extended the bounty of his goodness to those who needed it the most – the young. Encountering all kinds of youth throughout his ministry, Jesus healed, unbounded, forgave, comforted and confronted them. He did everything to enrich and enhance their lives (Fernandez, 2001).

If we are to minister to our young people today, the church needs to have the same attitude like that of Jesus. It needs to create an environment where youth feel loved and cared, which we witness in the ministry of Jesus towards young people

**The centurion's servant- Matthew 8/5-13** In this text, Jesus responding to the appeal of the centurion to heal his servant, says to the centurion that he would come and cure the servant and then admiring the faith of the centurion heals his servant instantly.

**The call of matthew- Matthew 9/9-13** Jesus notices a young man sitting at the tax booth and invites him to be his disciple, thereby radically changing the direction of Matthew's life and bringing about renewal in his heart.

**The rich young man – Mark 10/17-25** Jesus confronts with love a young man who has faithfully followed the law but has filled his heart with riches, to commit himself to a detached life.

**Jairus' daughter – Mark 5/ 21-43** Jesus restores life to a young girl whose father begged Jesus to lay his hands on her and make her well and alive.

**The widow's son – Luke 7/11-15** A widow loses her only son and Jesus moved with compassion comes to the widow's aid by raising her young son back to life.

**The possessed boy – Luke 9/37-43** On the heartrending appeal of a father whose only child a son is possessed by an unclean spirit, Jesus rebukes the demon, heals the boy and restores him back to his grateful father.

**The disciples of Emmaus – Luke 24/13-35** In his encounter with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus offers a fantastic model of youth ministry which denotes a process of befriending, enlightening, fellowship and witnessing.

All these texts reveal the love that Jesus had for young people throughout his life and the church today needs to continue this mission of Jesus, paying special attention to the young. Jesus did everything to reach out to young people so that they may experience the unconditional love of God and this is how we too ought to get involved in our ministry to the young.

### **Youth Ministry in Papal Teachings**

Following the example of Christ, the church too has always given importance and priority to the growth, development and welfare of young people. Various popes down the centuries as well as many prominent apostolic letters and papal exhortations clearly spell out the need, desire, mode and primacy of youth ministry in the Catholic church.

**Evangelii Nuntiandi (EN)** This apostolic exhortation of Pope Paul VI in 1975 suggested that the church devote its attention in particular to young people. The exhortation was of the opinion that the increasing numbers of youth, the fact that they are making their presence felt in society, the questions which trouble youth should arouse in everyone the desire to offer them zealously and wisely, the evangelical ideal as something to be known and lived (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 72) (Dillon, 2012).

**Christifideles Laici (CL)** Pope John Paul II in his post synodal exhortation of 1988 wished to give particular attention to the young. The papal exhortation mentioned that youth make up an exceptional potential and a great challenge for the future of the church. Infact the church sees her path towards the future in the youth, beholding in them a reflection of herself and her call to that blessed youthfulness which she constantly enjoys as a result of Christ's spirit (*Christifideles Laici* 46) (John Paul II, 1989).

**Ecclesia in Asia (EA)** This post synodal document clearly spells out the need for an organized youth apostolate in every diocese to promote the all-round formation of young people. The document reminds young people that they are not only the object for the church's pastoral care but also agents and co-workers in the church's mission in her various apostolic works of love and service (*Ecclesia in Asia* 47) (John Paul II, 2000).

**Pope speaks to India** Pope John Paul addressed various categories of people and especially the youth when he visited India in 1986. In his address to the youth of India during the youth rally at Shivaji Park, Mumbai on 10<sup>th</sup> February, 1986, he mentioned to them that the church supports young people as they face the challenges that are theirs as young people in India. The pope encouraged young people by saying that the church will help them to identify the problems in the world by clarifying the purpose of life, by insisting on the dignity of man, by sharing with them her understanding of humanity and above all by offering them Christ – the means to face all the problems of life (Rajan, 2002).

### **Views of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) on Youth**

Besides the catholic bishops of India who in a special way consider young people special and significant for the church in India, the Asian bishops too consider youth special. They were unanimously of the view that since Asia is young, the church in Asia must be young. The bishops held the view that the apostle in Asia must speak in languages and think the thoughts and feel in his heart the emotions of those who are young. He must be patient when they are impulsive, and understanding when they are unreasonable. Above all, he must appreciate their real contributions such as freshness of outlook, vitality, creativity, courage, compassion, integrity, generosity, their open heart and their willingness to learn.

The bishops desired that the youth see the church in Asia as worthy of their devotion and hope; a church which seeks to understand and trust them; a church which is responsive to their needs in contemporary times and above all a church which lives in deeds, day by day, the conviction of her faith and the imperatives of her compassion (FABC, 1986, No. 46d). Having seen the views of the magisterium on youth ministry, we focus on various models in catering to youth.

### **Models of Youth Ministry**

There are different models of youth ministry related to different philosophies and broadly based on three important approaches – contact, content and communion. They do illustrate that there are a variety of quality approaches to youth ministry that are independent of size and place considerations (Rajan, 2002). Youth ministry in the catholic dioceses can be organized in several ways depending on the way the whole diocese is structured and set up. Some of these models are discussed herein:

**Relational model** There is the relational model which is centered around relationships established between adult youth workers and young people. As adults get to know the youth in a personal way and build friendships with them, opportunities for ministry open up naturally.

**Community model** There is the community model where priority is given to building positive relationships between young people themselves.

**Discipleship model** The discipleship model emphasizes each person's walk with Christ.

**Service model** In the service model the emphasis is on the importance of learning the Christian faith by experience by being 'doers' of the word, by putting faith into practice.

**Worship model** The worship model approach gives significance to the place of worship and devotion in the life of the youth while the peer ministry model insists that the young must be invited and enabled to develop and share their own gifts and talents, particularly with their peers (Rajan, 2002).

In response to the increase of professional youth pastorship, a variety of youth ministry models have been suggested. Particularly timely and useful in this regard is the eight youth ministry paradigms: the models of friendship, spiritual awareness, servant leadership, liberation, biblical hermeneutic, liturgical-initiation, social justice, and Christian discipleship (Ji, 2011).

**Friendship model** The central concern of the friendship model is to create and sustain quality relationships in a church.

**Spiritual awareness model** This model focuses on nurturing a deeper spirituality and arousing a sense of holiness in the life of teenagers through self-awareness and personal discovery;

**Servant leadership model** Respecting and serving youth members with honesty and humility are paramount to the servant leadership model.

**Liberation model** The liberation model gives heavy attention to Jesus' call for compassion, justice, and peace;

**Biblical – hermeneutic model.** The biblical instruction of adolescents is pivotal to the biblical-hermeneutic model.

**Liturgical –initiation model** The liturgical-initiation model allows youth to experience the Supreme Being through a church's liturgy and ritual activities.

**Social justice model** The social justice model calls for justice, peace, and service for those in need.

**Christian discipleship model** The goal of the Christian discipleship model is to empower youth to experience God personally and internalize moral values, which involves a call to holiness (Ji, 2011).

In the Indian Catholic church, the centralized youth group model is being used for a very long time. Centralized youth groups (CYGs) are the traditional way of youth ministry. It consists of a single group based at the parish level comprising of 40-60 youth, headed by a priest youth animator, that meets regularly at a central venue. This group will function according to the aims, objectives, needs and goals of the parish. However, what is urgently needed today is the neighbourhood youth group model.

Neighbourhood youth groups (NYGs) are different groups based at the neighbourhood or small Christian community level of a parish and each group may consist of 30-40 youth. These groups are headed by an adult youth animator and meet regularly to provide youth with a local forum for various formation, fellowship and service oriented activities. The meetings are held according to the convenience of youth, the venue is the local neighbourhood and the medium of instruction is the language favoured by the local community or youth. In any given parish, there will be a number of NYGs and a great number of youth involved in these groups. What is heart-warming to know is that the NYGs have almost all elements from the youth ministry models mentioned above such as community, friendship, service, worship, bible, social justice and so on.

### **Neighbourhood Youth Groups - a New Way of Being Church to Youth**

Just as small Christian communities are a new way of being church (Redemptoris Missio 51) (John Paul, 1992), NYGs are indeed a new way of being church to youth. They form the new texture of the church which is called to change, if it is to be faithful to its mission of ministering to young people. They give opportunities to all young people who want to commit themselves seriously at the service of the church and society. NYGs give priority to the development of a strong community spirit, formation of leaders, insertion of youth into the realities of daily life and the struggle against various forms of injustice. They are an appropriate answer to the requirements of an ecclesiology of communion because the church is a communion. NYGs are a chance for the church in India to be inculturated and foster the sense of responsibility among the youth. They constitute a tangible way of being church as the people of God (Lumen Gentium 9) (O'Neill, 2010).

**Neighbourhood Youth Groups as Pastoral Communities** Neighbourhood youth groups have at their very centre and heart the well-being of the young, both as human and spiritual beings. It demonstrates this through its will to remain with young people, sharing their life, viewing their world with sympathy and respect and attending to their true needs and values. It also promotes and ensures a positive environment, filled with loving personal relationships and a communion of minds, that bonds young people together in special ways because of their kingdom values and binds them to shared goals, core values, coherent set of beliefs and engages them in actions for the welfare of themselves, the community and society at large (Vallabharaj, 2003).

Whenever NYGs meet on a regular basis, be it once a week or twice a month for activities such as review of life, reflection on personal experiences, social analysis, gospel sharing, community news, prayer, intercessions and planning for future action, much growth takes place. Human relationships are personalized, the Word of God is co-related to the very concrete circumstances of life, scriptures are discovered, prayers are linked to everyday events, family life is enhanced, involvement in social issues is desired and young people learn to improve their ability to welcome one another, listen to others, respect everyone and help those in need .

In other words, youth become more human, Christ centered and come closer to God thereby evolving neighbourhood youth groups into becoming pastoral communities (Morissette, 2012). A returning to the original Christian paradigm of community ought to become the true metaphor for ministry to and with the young.

**Neighbourhood Youth Groups Promote Personal and Spiritual Growth of Youth** In order to meet the challenges that youth present with regard to their belonging to the church, it is necessary to provide a church in which they find it worthwhile to live and neighbourhood youth groups (NYGs) provide such an environment. The spirituality of NYGs is personal and communitarian. The commitment to follow Jesus Christ leads the members of the NYGs to express their concern and commitment to their neighbours and others and in the concrete situation of the NYG gatherings, the youth encounter the poor and the needy.

A key foundation of the NYGs since it is modelled on the lines of small Christian communities is the Word of God. The youth in these small youth communities open their hearts and minds to the Good News of Jesus and grow in his divine life. When they share this Good News with the rest of the members, they grow in faith which they then express in service. Inspired by the Word of God, they work for the transformation of the world (Penha, 2014). The religious activities of NYGs appeal to the youth of today and are more readily acceptable. Where once there was implicit passive faith, there now emerges an explicit active faith and young people find their religiosity integrated into the life situations.

**Neighbourhood Youth Groups Create Leaders for Effective Youth Ministry** Ministerial leadership in youth ministry needs to follow the model of Jesus Christ, who not only was a servant leader but through his leadership evoked authentic community (Mt 20/26-27 & Mt 14/13-21) (Koroth, 2011). Jesus did not act alone. He purposefully invited others to share in his leadership, invested time and energy into empowering his team of disciples, engaged others who had gifts to share and constantly found ways to involve people in his work. Even as he led by his own life witness, Jesus created a whole leadership system to accomplish his mission. His system included the twelve apostles, who received significant

training and formation, other leaders who contributed in important ways to his overall mission and lots of people who shared what they had seen and heard and who brought others to follow him.

This is the model that helped Jesus accomplish his goal of sharing the Good News and this is the same model that will help a diocese or a parish to provide effective youth ministry (Eckert, 2009). Fortunately such a model exists in NYGs, since the youth themselves feel that not only leadership opportunities, but the ability to help young people realize their leadership potential is much more in NYGs than in other groups. Furthermore, NYGs help young people acquire leadership skills and become leaders.

**Neighbourhood youth groups – agents and builders of the Kingdom of God** The foundation and the goal of Christian ministry is nothing but the Kingdom of God which has set forth with the coming of Jesus Christ (Anthonisamy, 2003). The central focus for Jesus in his ministry was the Kingdom of God (Mt 6/33). A glance at the synoptic gospels reveals that Christ speaks very frequently of the Kingdom of God (Mk 1/15). Pope Paul VI describes the Kingdom as the absolute good to which everything else must defer (Evangelii Nuntiandi No.8).

The Kingdom vision of Jesus is doing God's will (Mt 6/10) and aims at transforming human aspirations and the world at large besides offering fullness of life (Lobinger & Mulakkal, 2014). The church as an agent of the Kingdom of God is entrusted with the task of ushering the people in every period of history in to the Kingdom, which is already present, but it has not yet reached its full accomplishment. Hence Christian pastoral ministry as the continuation of the mission of Christ is first and foremost the service or activity of and for the Kingdom of God (Anthonisamy, 2003).

In such a context, the neighbourhood youth communities (NYGs) working hand in hand with small Christian communities eventually become kingdom communities ensuring the Kingdom of God. Like the small Christian communities, NYGs by incarnating the church in the cultural milieu of the place, by proclamation through a dialogue of life, by working together with its diverse neighbours for a common cause, by fostering involvement in civic and political affairs and collaborating with other religions and secular groups, help in promoting a more just and equitable social order. Young people working in these NYGs therefore have a responsibility to bear witness for the Kingdom of God. This demands from them the willingness and readiness to cooperate with all people of goodwill for building God's kingdom.

Even though the Kingdom of God is an eschatological reality, what is urgently needed from young people is a struggle for the coming of the Kingdom, implantation of the values and principles of Christ, being faithful to our call as agents and builders of God's kingdom and believing that the final establishment of the Kingdom of God will one day eventually arrive. It is therefore heart-warming that NYGs blessed by their smallness, territorial advantage, social responsibility and grassroot networking become a very effective structural tool today for the realization of the building of the Kingdom of God.

### **Conclusion**

The youth are a living sign of the springtime in our church. They are a precious part of our community and have an important role to play in the church with their energy and vitality. If the church journeys with youth, many new horizons of love and service will evolve and the objectives of ministering to youth itself will be realized. It is essential that young

people be given the opportunity to develop in a balanced manner and to make a positive contribution to church and society.

As we have seen, a concerted effort through the neighbourhood youth groups (NYGs) can provide youth with communitarian, leadership, spiritual, social, economic, personal and other forms of support both within and outside the church system as well as structured opportunities for leisure activity. The entire community is responsible for youth ministry and calls youth to discipleship, active participation in the church's mission and healthy personal and spiritual development. The church through the NYGs can provide value based direction that aims at creating structures that will raise the consciousness of the youth and create a country that is truly based on gospel values. NYGs are the need of the hour, if we want the church to answer the aspirations of young people today and help them to find relevant answers to the fundamental questions of human existence. They are also an answer to a new changing environment and a new strategy as far as ministering to youth is concerned.

Young lives should be productive for Christ, satisfying to youth, profitable to the church and counting for eternity. If the church is to be fully alive in this millennium, it will be because it is energized by young people who believe deeply. The young are the present as well as future evangelizers of the world and servants of the poor. It is important for the church today to reach out to young people and offer them a strong Christian formation. We have a wonderful gift to offer young people through the NYGs and we must bring it to them joyfully and generously. Let's allow youth to dream great dreams for India and for the Catholic Church. Let them make a difference.

### References

- Anthonisamy, R. L. (2003). *Youth violence and pastoral care*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang GmbH.
- Arimpoor, J. (1982). *Indian youth in perspective*. Tirupattur: Sacred Heart College.
- Arockiaswamy, A. (2011). *A new paradigm for youth ministry today*. Bangalore: SFS.
- Catholic Bishop's Conference of India. (1996.) *A plan for youth ministry in India*. New Delhi: C.B.C.I. Commission for Youth.
- Dhinakaran, B. G. (2010). Modern youth and the church. *Sedos Bulletin*, 42(1), 272-289.
- Dillon, D.M. (2012). *Evangelii Nuntiandi - Evangelization in the modern world*. In Flannery, A (Ed.), *Vatican council II –Volume II - More post conciliar documents* (pp 735–786). Mumbai: ST PAULS.
- Diocesan youth centre. (1995). *Guidelines for parish youth movements*. Mumbai: Diocesan Youth Centre.
- Eckert, A. M. (2009). Building community with youth. In East, T (Ed.), *Leadership for Catholic youth ministry* (pp 124–145). New London: Twenty Third Publications.
- Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference. (1986). *Laity and ministry to youth*. FABC papers No. 46d.
- Fernandez, J. (2001). *Youth ministry the Jesus way*. Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications.
- Holderness, G. (1981). *Youth Ministry the new team approach*. Atlanta: John Knox Press.

- Ji, C. (2011). Youth pastor, youth ministry, and youth attitude toward the church. *Review Of Religious Research*, 52(3), 306-322.
- John Paul II. (1989). *Christifidelis Laici*. Mumbai: Pauline Publications.
- John Paul II. (1992). *Redemptoris Missio*. Mumbai: St. Paul Publications.
- John Paul II. (2000). *Ecclesia in Asia*. Mumbai: Pauline Publications.
- Koroth, S. (2011). Youth ministry as a team ministry. *Kristu Jyoti*, 27(1 & 2), 45-66.
- Lobinger, F., & Mulakkal, F. (2014). SCCs – A means to transform the world. In T. Vijay, F. Scaria, & E. Colaco (Eds.), *Breaking Ground- Papers presented at The International Theological Congress on SCCs* (pp 122-151). Nagpur: PAC Publications.
- Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. (2003). *National youth policy*. India: Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.
- Morissette, H. (2012). Small youth communities for a new evangelization. In Choondal, G (Ed.), *New paradigms for youth catechesis* (pp 59-97). Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications.
- Mullick, S. (2010). Towards a renewed youth pastoral plan. *Kristu Jyoti*, 26(1), 147-163.
- O'Neill, C. (2010). Lumen Gentium - Dogmatic constitution on the church. In Flannery, A (Ed.), *Vatican council II –Volume I - The conciliar and post conciliar documents* (pp 320-385). Mumbai: ST PAULS.
- Penha, B. (2014). The new way of being church. In T. Vijay, F. Scaria, & E. Colaco (Eds.), *Breaking Ground- Papers presented at The International Theological Congress on SCCs* (pp 22-41). Nagpur: PAC Publications.
- Rajan, P. A. (2002). *Accompanying youth today*. Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation.
- Rajan, P. A. (2004). *Pastoral care of adolescents and young adults*. Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation.
- Rosario, A. (2010). Youth in emerging India: Challenges and possibilities. *Catholic India*, 21(1), 37-41.
- Vallabaraj, J. (2003). *Empowering the young towards fullness of life*. Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications.
- Warren, M. (1978). *Resources for youth ministry*. New York: Paulist Press.