

## A Parish Home for Young People

Our Church relatively recently concluded international Synod proceedings on the Young Church culminating in a clarion call from Pope Francis to the young and to those who minister with them. In quite 'un-pope-like' language Francis tells the young in his post-Synodal Exhortation – *Live Christ* (Christus Vivit):

***Dear young people, make the most of these years of your youth. Don't observe life from a balcony. Don't confuse happiness with an armchair, or live your life behind a screen. Whatever you do, do not become the sorry sight of an abandoned vehicle! Don't be parked cars, but dream freely and make good decisions. Take risks, even if it means making mistakes. Don't go through life anaesthetized or approach the world like tourists. Make a ruckus! Cast out the fears that paralyze you, so that you don't become young mummies. Live! Give yourselves over to the best of life! Open the door of the cage, go out and fly! Please, don't take early retirement.***

CV143

### Can young people do this in our parishes?

Perhaps the biggest single theme to emerge from the Synod was the need to **accompany** our young. We cannot do this if their place among us is limited to our Catholic schools because they feel no reason to be involved and no sense of belonging in our parish communities. This year, we assess our needs and our assets for the foreseeable future. While this is only part of the 'community-equation', our gathering spaces remain critical to our appeal to younger generations.

We offer to you below the **succinct results** of some recent basic research we have undertaken into what young people find attractive in contemporary Catholic church environments. Our enquiries and these recommendations are not intended to be comprehensive, but they offer the recurrent themes that emerged as we spoke with older teenagers and young adults. Those consulted included weekly Mass-goers, Catholic non-attenders, and Catholic young people attending non-Catholic churches.

We asked various groups of young people:

1. *What do you find important in a gathering space? (Churches, Presbyteries, Halls, etc.)*
2. *When you have felt most engaged in a Church service (be it Mass, youth group, or something else), what was the building like? How did the physical environment make you feel welcome?*
3. *What would a church building need to look like for you to feel comfortable inviting a friend who is not very Catholic?*
4. *What about Monday-Saturday – what might church buildings be used for to serve the wider local community?*

They said all sorts of things, but **these ideas came up time and again:**

## *Young people hope for...*

### Multi-purpose spaces

Modernise the space to make it multi-purpose – design and renovate or build to create spaces that people feel comfortable using for much more than just Mass.

Recommendations:

- Use moveable, comfortable (padded) seating (not pews) and allow it to be re-configured, reduced or removed for some uses.
- Utilise blessed sacrament chapel arrangements that permit and encourage other-than-sacred use of the main ‘auditorium’ space.
- Make hospitality a top priority. Large gathering spaces with excellent kitchen facilities located within the church proper and not small ones hidden away.

### Accessibility

Church buildings must be accessible to all ‘kinds’ of people including Catholic and non-Catholic groups. Recommendations:

- Disability access and inclusion – but this is now a standard requirement.
- Locate churches on or very close to school grounds. Let teenagers (college students) become familiar with the multi-use church space.
- Don’t lock the doors! Dropping in for prayer or other use must be normal.
- Let young people have access to built-in audio-visual equipment (for programmes, classes, groups more than personal use) and wireless internet.

### Beautiful space

Aesthetics are important to young people. Practical yes, but what makes it a church is it’s light and beauty as a sacred space. Students noted that a school gym/hall is never a sacred space to them. The critical aspects of church buildings that were noted by young people included:

- Stained glass windows
- Wood finishes
- Excellent lighting (natural brightness and multi-switched dimmable LED lighting for creating contemporary prayer environments).
- A ‘lived in’ and ‘loved’ space rather than too tidy / sterile.
- Artwork that is reflective of our era and the local community (young, local, Māori, changeable, Polynesian, modern - not Eurocentric, permanent, old, boring, washed out, traditional-only...).

### Inclusivity and Diversity

Establishing an immediate sense of welcome is vital on entry to the church.

Recommendations:

- Visible local artwork, notices, photographic images, etc. that reflect diversity (age, ethnicity, gender, culture, etc.), indicate activity and make every person

sense familiarity (Catholic or not!). The entrance gathering space speaks volumes about the welcome here.

- Relaxed and inviting seating (café style?) indicating an expectation of gathering.
- Flexible space and furniture with expectation that occasional 'transformation' will occur for different occasions (especially youth events).

## 'We are more than just Sunday people!'

A strong message emerged that church buildings should be alive and used regularly throughout the week by the wider community. The young recognised that Catholics are called to serve our whole community, not just other Catholics and not just explicitly worshipping God. Recommendations:

- Establish a café – just imagine who could use it as a gathering point.
- Create a regular after-school hang-out space (with games, homework tutoring... etc).
- Consider a local soup kitchen or food bank.
- Use any spare land for a community garden and veggie co-op.
- Create a community-centre with library (not only religious), internet, and computers.
- Include a localised Vinnies outlet – regular pop-up free shop?
- Arrange for other things to happen on Sunday after Mass.

We offer these ideas to assist you in responding to +John's 2019 directive to review our churches and presbyteries. The recommendations above provide a glimpse into a young perspective and it is hoped that this may foster insight and creativity in decisions about what you recommend is kept, altered (and how) and what should be disposed of in coming years.

**The Church Mission Team are happy to come to your parish and meet with you to explore these findings further if that would help.** Please make contact by phone or email to arrange a time that suits.

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