

YOUTH MINISTRY
IN THE TERRITORY OF THE CROATIAN CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS

1. Youth ministry within the framework of the Committee for Young People of the Croatian Conference of Bishops

The Committee for Youth Ministry of the Croatian Conference of Bishops (CCB) consists of the youth commissioners from all 16 arch/dioceses and representatives of religious communities dealing with the young: Franciscans, Jesuits, Salesians and nuns delegated by the Croatian Union of Major Superiors. Each arch/diocese has its own youth commission that, within the framework of its pastoral ministry, creates work with the young in their arch/diocese for the current year. The Office of the Croatian Conference of Bishops for Youth Ministry was established in 2002.

The tasks of the Office of the CCB for Youth Ministry are to inform and coordinate the Committee for Youth Ministry, inform and, in cooperation with the Committee, submit proposals to the Croatian Conference of Bishops, cooperate with all the bodies and institutions of the CCB, cooperate with similar institutions in other countries, create archives and a database on all the activities for the young, inform the public (especially young people) about all events and activities, encourage the networking and coordination of young people, and encourage and propose new ideas and forms of youth ministry.

The projects of the Office for Youth Ministry of the Croatian Conference of Bishops are as follows: Easter Festival, Finals of the Croatian Indoor Football Leagues of the Church among the Croats, Young People for Young People, National Encounters, World Youth Day and the Taizé ecumenical meetings.

a. Easter Festival

The Easter Festival of the musical and spiritual creativity of the young presents various musical styles, from chansons and pop to various directions in rock (pop rock, neoclassical rock, heavy metal), Latino, disco, funky, techno ... The majority of the songs are intended for nonliturgical performance but there have also been attempts at past Easter Festivals to present compositions that could find a place in the celebration of the liturgy.

For more than 30 years, many composers, lyricists, arrangers and performers have contributed their talents to the Easter Festival. This project is organized by the Office of the CCB for Youth Ministry in cooperation with Croatian Catholic Radio (HKR).

b. Young People for Young People

Our bishops and priests have a great desire to help young people grow in faith, specific engagement in their parishes, formation etc., because they view the young, whose needs are considerable, with

genuine concern and hope for the Church and nation. Only two months after the opening of the Office for Youth Ministry of the CCB in November 2002, a pilot project, Young People for Young People, was inaugurated in the Diocese of Požega, which concluded successfully in July 2003.

Since then, the pilot project has grown into the program YOUNG PEOPLE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, with the following contents: 1. the basic formation of animators, 2. general training of animators, 3. training of instructors of animators and 4. Animator Summer.

The project has resulted from a lot of prayer, experience (including international), meetings, teamwork, research and study, and is called Young People for Young People because young people actually lead this program with the full support and constant presence of bishops, priests and nuns, and is also focused on the young. To date, it has been conducted in all the arch/dioceses in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

An Animator and How to Become One

A CHRISTIAN ANIMATOR is directly and constantly involved in the community of the young, with the role of encouraging young people to associate with each other and mature together, with the help of the experience of the group. An animator is a person who gives himself to the young and is prepared to spend his life in the education of the young, and to share experiences, values, hopes and problems with them. An animator is an educator and always seems to be where young people are. He organizes life for the group, community, and encourages them to participate in educational activities, and also tries, through fun, games and creative workshops, to provide educational contents and promote common human values. The young are his life's commitment and, therefore, we say that it is a calling. Such work is motivated by pastoral love.

Therefore, the formation of an animator, which is a path in faith, necessarily includes the formation of his attitudes in harmony with those of Christ. Formation also includes personal maturation. Therefore, an animator is concerned with his personal identity and from day to day must evaluate his educational objectives, behavior and life. He finds and refines the motives upon which his service is based. In the process of maturation, these motives often change but the goal remains unchanged, while at the same time he has to know what kind of society and Church he wants to build. Moreover, he must be professional if he wants to transmit his experience. This professionalism and experience are achieved through working as an educator. In an animator's formation, he must work on developing an animator's mentality, the acquisition of the technical and operational expertise and the ability to communicate in order to be able to work within a group and lead it. His formation is actually never completed. As long as he works, he must continue his professional training. In addition to his personal identity and suitable qualifications, he must also be concerned with his personal spirituality because it is an essential element of his identity. An animator acquires the experience of God through his work because as he leads a group, he also travels a spiritual path with them, which has its stages.

In this way, a young person proves himself and grows, confirming his values, discovering his abilities and gifts that he places at the disposal of others in his service, discovering that all people are unique

and have tremendous opportunities for generous giving in love to our brothers and sisters, and understands that everything that they have done, all their lives and concern for others, is a response to their needs and nothing other than Christian ministry.

Instructors of Animators

The training of instructors of animators is a program through which animators who have completed their general training are taught to conduct the basic formation and general training of other animators.

Those animators may participate in formation who, after their general training, have had two years of experience working in a parish and arch/diocese, with the approval of the commissioner for youth ministry of his arch/diocese.

The objectives of training are as follows: acquiring detailed knowledge about the program of the project Young People for Young People and the strengthening and spreading of the Catholic identity and self-awareness of the young for active and responsible participation in the Church and society; learning how to engage, organize and conduct the education of the young, how to lead projects for the young at the level of the arch/diocese and at the national level, facilitate the flow of information at the level of the Office—arch/diocese, and help organize projects in the arch/diocesan commissions for youth ministry.

An animator instructor can be a person who has completed basic formation and general training as an animator, who has actively participated as an animator for at least two years in the work of his parish community, who is active at the arch/diocesan level and who is an ardent believer who wants to transmit his experience of faith and work to others..

Implementation of the Program

The program for the training of an instructor of animators lasts for seven days, during which participants undergo a program for basic formation and training. The contents of the interactive workshops are as follows: nonverbal communication, co-leadership, group leadership, presentations, how to conduct an evaluation, how to write a project, critical observation, media, advertisements, how to conduct a meeting etc.

c. THE CATHOLIC INDOOR FOOTBALL LEAGUE

The Catholic Indoor Football League, commonly known as KMNL, is a living form of youth ministry within the dioceses. The first KMNL was launched under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Zagreb in 1998 and grew out of the popular Easter Cup, organized by the Parish of St. Peter. Rijeka established its league in 2001. Subsequently, part of the KMNL was established in Slavonia with headquarters in Osijek and another league was established in the Archdiocese of Split-Makarska.

As indoor football in the Christian spirit became increasingly popular among young Croats, the spirit of the KMNL has also spread. Today, under the auspices of the Office of the CCB for Youth Ministry, the

finals of the Church among the Croats are being held. Within the entire KMNL more than 3,500 young people on over 250 parish teams are competing.

However, for the young Catholic players, the sports aspect of the KMNL is not the primary consideration. Spirituality is a very important aspect of the Catholic indoor football league. Players and leaders frequently participate in retreats. Organized attendance at Masses and adorations occur several times a year, varying by region. Positive thinking, socializing, meeting people and developing friendships are all parts of the KMNL, which represents these young people.

Matches are played according to the strict FIFA Futsal rules, in the presence of delegated referees, and are not places where you will hear insults and cursing because such behavior is punishable by two months suspension or even a red card for cursing God, the saints or the Blessed Virgin Mary. However, it should be said that such serious warnings occur very rarely because everyone knows the kind of league it is and that there is no place for such behavior in the KMNL. Charitable work and volunteering are further aspects. In this sense, tournaments and other campaigns are organized in which young peoples' openness to social involvement is expressed.

d. NATIONAL ENCOUNTERS OF CATHOLIC YOUTH

The Encounter of Croatian Catholic Youth is a national gathering that has assembled thousands of young people from all the Croatian arch/dioceses and Catholic missions every two years since it was established. Since 2004 the Office, together with the host archdioceses, has been the co-organizer of the encounters, which are also attended by young Croatian emigrants.

So far, there have been nine encounters in various Croatian arch/dioceses, each with its own motto: Split (1996)—[“With Christ in the Third Millennium,”](#) Rijeka (2000)—[“And the Word Became Flesh,”](#) Osijek (2002)—[“Save Us in Your Name,”](#) Šibenik (2004)—[“Put out into Deep Water,”](#) Pula (2006)—[“The Teacher is Here and Is Calling You,”](#) Varaždin (2008)—[“They Devoted Themselves,”](#) Zadar (2010)—[“That Your Joy May Be Complete,”](#) Sisak (2012)—[“Let Us Walk in the Light”](#) and Dubrovnik (2014)—[“Called to Freedom.”](#) The jubilee tenth Encounter of Croatian Catholic Youth will be held in 2017 in the city of Vukovar, with the motto “Christ, Our Hope.”

e. INTERNATIONAL ENCOUNTERS

WORLD YOUTH DAYS—The Office for Youth Ministry of the Croatian Conference of Bishops coordinates applications and informs young people about all the events that will occur at the encounter. The organizers always encourage the formation of macro-groups, owing to the large number of registered pilgrims, as this facilitate the formation of sub-groups. We regularly receive e-mails from the local organizers as well as the Pontifical Council for the Laity, which is the co-organizer of this event. It is necessary to arrange a place for the catechesis of our pilgrims, accommodations in the host city and on Missionary Days in the dioceses, which take place a week earlier, help the leaders with applications (because there are always questions and uncertainties), inform them, register the young people who participate in some of the important ceremonies of World Youth Day with the organizers, make arrangements related to logistics, delegate animation groups for catechesis etc.

For example, in anticipation of the most recent World Youth Day in Krakow, young people prepared for this encounter in their dioceses and parish communities with the leaders who would take them there. Furthermore, the young people were able to prepare personally during the previous months by watching livestream video catechesis that took place once a month in the shrine of Divine Mercy in Krakow. The topics varied and the leaders of catechesis were from various parts of the world.

From the Office, we urged young people to have two years of spiritual preparation for World Youth Day, in an organized program that concludes with nine Eucharistic adorations within the framework of the Novena of Mercy held on Wednesday, June 22.

The first year of spiritual preparation focused on the Novena for the Salvation of Young People, a devotion on first Fridays. In June 2015 at Holy Mass, this devotion was led by Bishop Mijo Gorski and concluded with the renewal of the consecration of Croatian youth to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which first occurred in 1900.

The second year, in the Year of Mercy, there was focus on the Novena of Mercy with nine Eucharistic adorations, every 22nd of the month, beginning in October, the memorial of St. John Paul II, and ending in June 2016. February 22, 2016, was the 85th anniversary of the apparition of the Merciful Jesus to St. Faustina Kowalska, when she was ordered to direct the painting of a picture of Divine Mercy with the inscription: “Jesus, I trust in You.” An intention of this novena was to spread the devotion to Divine Mercy, as revealed by the Merciful Jesus to Sr. Faustina Kowalska, among the young and, thereby, encourage them to trust in God’s goodness and be merciful to others. The novena was prayed in several cities in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro.

The intentions of the two years of spiritual preparation of young people were the spiritual and moral revival of Croatian youth, peace in the world, the canonization of the “most brilliant figure of the Church among the Croats,” Alojzije Stepinac; and blessed fruits of World Youth Day 2016 in Krakow, the largest shrine to Divine Mercy in the world.

TAIZÉ – Ecumenical encounters are the program of the brothers from the Taizé Community. The Office of the CCB for Youth Ministry coordinates applications from young people to the Pilgrimage of Trust on Earth for young adults, which is organized every December in a different city. Six hundred young people from Croatia participated in the last pilgrimage, which was held in Riga. Furthermore, the Office has the task of organizing a regional encounter of Croats during this encounter.

2. Work with Young People in the Area of Archdiocesan and Diocesan Pastoral Activity

In addition to projects on the national level, work with young people also takes place at the level of the individual dioceses. The projects in this sense are varied, depending on the possibilities and activities of the individual dioceses or archdioceses. We present only some of the most accepted models for working with young people at these levels.

a. Ways of the Cross for the Young

Ways of the Cross for the Young are organized every year during the Lenten season, more precisely, prior to the end of Lent. Youth ministry commissioners with their teams on the territories of the archdioceses and dioceses are responsible for the organization of these Ways of the Cross, as well as other projects. Lenten Ways of the Cross at the diocesan level may be preceded by deanery or interdeanary Ways of the Cross.

b. Youth Encounters at the Diocesan and Archdiocesan Levels

Youth encounters are held every year and, in a sense, are at the heart of the spiritual renewal of the young people in individual dioceses. Preparations for such encounters are made in the parish communities, with specific pastoral and catechetical guidelines.

c. Encounters of Altar Servers at the Diocesan and Archdiocesan Levels

Since many altar servers are between 14 and 18 years of age, once a year at the diocesan level, encounters of altar servers are held within the framework of a spiritual but also fun meeting.

d. Festivals of Christian Music

In some dioceses, there are annual encounters of the composers, lyricists and performers of Church and spiritual music. Such festivals are often either organized by commissioners for youth ministry in the territory of a diocese or by a religious community. In addition to a special religious program, sometimes of a competitive nature, these encounters provide an exceptional opportunity for young people to use their creativity to express their Christian faith in their own ways.

e. Catechetical Olympics

In cooperation with state institutions responsible for education, the Croatian Conference of Bishops organizes and holds Catechetical Olympics for secondary school students. A large number of young people between 14 and 18 years of age participate in quizzes, organized festivals and the Catechetical Olympics, which take place annually.

f. Work with College Students

Working with students at universities in large cities or students ordinarily is also an opportunity and excellent indicator of the Church's activities with young people. For this purpose, many dioceses have a chaplain for the young who assembles and works with college students on various religious, professional or scientific projects. Within the framework of such work, there are associations such as the Student Catholic Center (Zagreb and other places), which regularly work with students within the

framework of various projects. Such projects are often crosslinked with the projects of the Croatian Conference of Bishops. In addition to the aforementioned Student Catholic Center, there are others, owing to the charism of various associations (scouts etc.) that are also involved in the life and work of the Church in a given area.

g. Religious and Entertainment Programs for Youth Ministry

Although all encounters with young people have programs with spiritual and entertainment content, we wish to mention a project known as the “Croatian Underground,” which operates within the auspices of the Archdiocese of Split-Makarska. The project consists of monthly meetings of young people from this archdiocese at which they present witty sketches on a variety of current topics from Church or secular life. Such sketches provide opportunities for spiritual reflection, lectures and discussions.

h. Diocesan and Parish Work with Young People

Many parish communities devote time and energy to pastoral and catechetical work with young people. In most cases, this involves the participation of the young in the liturgical life of a parish community (youth choirs, liturgical services and Caritas, and at the deanery level there are also volunteer and charitable activities). Such initiatives, which have often developed from specific areas of a parish community, frequently spill over into Church life at the local or particular level in various ways.

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