

Welcoming • Young • People

From Tu Kahikatea | Evangelisation

The starting point for evangelisation is our recognition of the presence of God already in young people, their experiences, their families, and their culture. Evangelisation is our energising core, since everything we do must proclaim the Good News. Our ministry invites the young to deepen their relationship with Jesus and live more fully as his disciples. Evangelisation is an integral part of youth ministry because it:

- proclaims the Good News of Jesus in a way that invites young people to 'come and see'; witnesses to our faith in all aspects of our lives;
- reaches out to young people by meeting them in their various life situations, building relationships, providing care and concern, offering a genuine response to their hungers and needs, and inviting young people to be in relationship with Jesus and the Christian community;
- invites young people personally into the life and mission of the Catholic community;
- calls young people to grow in personal relationship with Jesus, adopting his message and joining the ongoing process of conversion;
- challenges young people to follow Jesus in a life of discipleship – shaping their lives in the vision, values, and teachings of Jesus and living his mission in their daily lives through witness and service;
- invites young people to be evangelisers of others.

Our top tips for reaching out and saying WELCOME to young people

1. Ministry to young people is relational. To get young people coming back you need to look at the culture and regular activities of the young people you want to attract to your group. What are they doing? Where do they hang out? What kind of music are they listening to? What do they like? Put yourself in their shoes and really try to understand what they enjoy doing.
2. We can't emphasise enough that it is important to build a relationship with each young person. Get to know the person and let them get to know you so that they can learn to trust you and appreciate what you are saying. Always make an effort to go up to them and say "Hi" and "Welcome". Make sure your body language matches your words – smile and *really* make the person feel welcome.
3. Plan ahead. Make a calendar of all the important events. This should include your own meetings and events AND also other events and activities in your community / school / parish that will be of interest to the young people. Turning up at a sports afternoon and cheering on the young people in your group will go a long way to show that you really do care.
4. If your parish or group has a College in the area you might be able to visit the school and hang out with the young people. You could take treats or encourage a service or prayer activity at lunch time occasionally. Encourage those who are already in your group to bring friends along.
5. If you can make a list of all the young people in your parish and make contact with those people.... again and again! Remember again, the focus is to start building a relationship with that person. Try different approaches for example, send a list of events and activities coming up, text a reminder of a meeting on that day, make contact with the parent or care giver.
6. Make announcements at Masses the Sunday before the meeting. If you have young people who are confident encourage the young people to make the announcements and then stand at the door so that potential newbies can stop and ask questions of existing youth group members.

Announcements need to be inviting. Make sure you are clear about who you are inviting eg young people aged 13 to 17 or young adults or ...

7. Ask your priest to get involved. Have them individually invite young people to join the youth group and/or have the priest host a meeting or social event (eg a dinner). Young people often don't have much time with priests so getting your priest involved is a great way to extend a welcome to young people and to give the priest the opportunity to get to know young people in his parish/group.

Our top tips for making your meeting say **WELCOME** to young people

1. As young people arrive make sure that leaders of the group connect with each person and make them feel welcome. Don't leave any young person standing alone feeling like they are lost or not welcome. Have one or two people specifically designated to watch for anybody who looks a bit lost.
2. Spend some time making sure that the meeting place says WELCOME. Is it cold or is it nice and cosy? If you have a really large hall to meet in can you segment it off with dividers to make a smaller more intimate space – can you use a carpet square or cushions to make the area warmer/cosier?
3. Music is important. Music is the key to the hearts of young people. Be sure to find out what music your young people are listening to and have some music playing in the background as they arrive and use some music in your programme. If you are fortunate enough to have musicians on your team then be sure to maximise this. If not, invest in some good speakers and have a range of music on your phone or laptop.
4. Food! We often say that the first rule in youth ministry is free (or at least cheap) food. Be sure to include some time for hospitality in your programme. Often food is a great way to involve other parishioners or parents. Many adults are happy to support ministry to young people in this way – it could be different teams of people donating snacks for each meeting. Some parish councils are also providing a small budget to youth groups provide food and drinks to young people who gather. Again listen to the young people about what they want to eat. There is no point in providing potato chips, chocolate and soft drinks if your group are all health-conscious and into diets. A group like this will be looking for healthier options.
5. Have your parish priest or another person from the parish leadership team welcome the young people and attend or at least drop in to meetings from time to time. Make sure that the young people in your parish or group hear that they REALLY are welcome.
6. Invite participation from others. Just because you are leading or co-ordinating ministry to young people doesn't mean that you have to do it all yourself! Tu Kahikatea Standing Tall, the framework for ministry to young people in the Catholic Church of Aotearoa New Zealand is very clear that our ministry is the responsibility of the wider parish or group community. Be sure to find roles for parents and other parishioners to connect with and support the young people.
7. Get feedback from the young people. Find out what they like and what they don't like. Also ask them for ideas about what they would like to see included in the programme. We often put out eight sheets and give an explanation of the eight components of a comprehensive youth ministry: advocacy, catechesis, community life, evangelisation, justice and service, leadership development, pastoral care, prayer and worship. If you would like a template for this contact the ACYM team.

ABOVE ALL ELSE ... remember that God is with you. It is God who will bring the young people to your ministry. The Holy Spirit is the one who is leading. Relax and enjoy your role of ministry to young people.