

FEATURE

Pastoral plan outlines many ministry methods



By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Paul K. Henderson believes that the U.S. church sees much at stake in implementing a new pastoral plan to reach young adults.

"If we as a church don't pay attention to their concerns and needs and help young adults ... they're not going to be there later," said Henderson, executive director for the Secretariat for the Third Millennium and the Year 2000 of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a telephone interview from his Washington, D.C., office. Henderson facilitated the committee that wrote the plan.

According to Catholic News Service, the U.S. bishops Nov. 12 approved by voice vote the pastoral plan for young adult ministry, "Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry With Young Adults." The approval came during the bishops' fall general meeting in Washington.

In brief, the plan says that the church must use every available means — from the Internet to health clubs — to reach young adult Catholics. The plan also contains a warning to the church if it chooses to ignore young adults. Many young adults are moving "away from an institutional conception of religion to an individual conception of faith," the plan says, and "this is particularly true for those born in the 1970s and 1980s."

Young adults are often attracted to cults, spiritual movements and fundamentalist churches because they don't feel at home in Catholic parishes where much of the membership is older than it was 20 years ago, the plan says. Young adults also find their values "no longer come primarily from family and church, but from friends, the media and contemporary society."

The plan was developed by the Bishops' Committee on the Laity after it held

several months of meetings with young adults throughout the country, the NCCB statement said. That committee's chairman, Bishop Tod D. Brown of Boise, Idaho, said the plan highlights the broad range of options available to the church for meeting young adults' needs.

"All ages are welcome in the church, and all ages need the church," said Bishop Brown in the NCCB statement. "This plan urges church leaders to do more for young adults, and young adults to do more for the church. It spans a broad spectrum and makes clear that young adults of every state in life are included."

In association with the Catholic Campus Ministry Association and the National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association, an implementation committee will hold three regional conferences on the plan in 1997, according to Sheila Garcia, assistant director for the Secretariat for Family, Laity, Women and Youth of the NCCB.

In a phone interview with the *Courier* from Washington, Garcia said the conferences would take place in April in Arlington, Va.; May in San Diego; and in June in Chicago. The conferences will help young adult ministry leaders from around the country swap tips on implementing the plan's goals and help them to identify resources and experts who can help young adult ministry leaders with their work, she said.

According to the summary, the plan emphasizes that young adults must be actively invited and welcomed into the life of the church, describes their situation today and offers ministerial approaches to them.

The plan outlines four goals for successful young adult ministry:

- Inviting and welcoming young adults into the church.
- Connecting them with Jesus Christ.
- Connecting young adults with the church's mission.
- Connecting young adults with peers who will nurture and strengthen their

faith.

The plan also suggests the church reach out to young adults in three specific ways — evangelization, faith community formation and pastoral care.

To evangelize, the plan calls on the church and its parishes to reach out "through personal invitations, telephone calls, bulletin notices, letters, the Internet and e-mail." The plan also urges that young adults involved with the church "invite friends and other peers to community events" and calls for church members to identify and visit places "where young adults gather, such as the workplace, shopping areas, health clubs, campuses, athletic fields, and civic associations."

Marriage preparation programs are cited, in particular, as offering opportunities to evangelize young adults.

"Young adults approach the church to be married for a number of reasons, including parental pressure, the desire to have a church wedding, or to reunite themselves with the Church," the plan states. "Regardless of why they come, the Church and its ministers need to welcome them as Christ welcomes them, with understanding, love and acceptance."

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challenging them with the gospel message, and giving them hope that a life-long commitment is possible."

The plan suggests enhancing marriage preparation programs by having married couples mentor engaged couples and by having parishes publicly pray for engaged couples and inviting them to have their engagements blessed by the community.

The plan also calls on parishes to involve young adults in the baptism ritual of their children as another means of evangelization.

It urges clergy to discuss vocations more often in their homilies, and the church to invite young people to volunteer for one year of community service.

To form faith communities, the plan recommends developing activities and materials that target young adults, especially "prayer groups and small Christian communities which place value on dialogue and shared communal experiences."

Young adults should also be invited to plan church events, the plan says. In particular, recent college graduates and vacationing students should be called upon to be liturgical ministers and parish youth leaders, it states.

To form a Christian conscience, the plan recommends the church use catechesis, music and preaching to motivate young adults to work for justice and peace in their communities and jobs. The church should recognize young adults active in social justice organizations and encourage their work, the plan says.

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— Sons and Daughters of the Light

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— Bishop Tod Brown

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