



That Christ may be formed in them

Accompanying youth on their journey of faith



A MISSIONARY MOVEMENT AT THE SERVICE OF THE CHURCH



Published by the Jesus Youth International Team

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ACCOMPANYING YOUTH ON THEIR JOURNEY OF FAITH

1. Accompanying youth on their journey of faith has been the favoured mission of the Jesus Youth movement and a fine-tuning of the same becomes especially vital in these changing times. Thoughts on faith formation remain uppermost in our minds today as the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI has announced the Year of Faith, which he says, will be “a good opportunity to usher the whole Church into a time of particular reflection and rediscovery of the faith”¹. For the Jesus Youth movement this signals a Spirit-led next step in its journey of responding to “the signs of the times”² and reviewing its efforts at nurturing the faith of the new generation.

The declaration of the year has also been most eagerly welcomed in the Jesus Youth movement as a God-given opportunity for ‘fostering the graces of the Jubilee’³. The recently concluded Jubilee was a time of special grace for everyone in the movement, during the course of which there were numerous occasions to reflect on the call and mission of Jesus Youth. Faith formation of the contemporary generation leading them to a renewed commitment to Christian life and active mission has been the special charism of the movement. As the Holy Father wants “this Year to arouse in every believer the aspiration to profess the faith in fullness and with renewed conviction, with confidence and hope”⁴ the Jesus Youth movement also will take time to rediscover its vision of faith formation in greater clarity and reorder its formation approaches with clearer focus and efficacy.

JY formation in perspective

2. Informal, grass-root beginnings gradually creating wider ripples and enduring fruits is at the heart of the dynamics of Jesus Youth movement. This has been quite true also of the evolution of the movement’s

1. Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, 4

2. Mt. 16:3

3. ‘Fostering the Graces of the Jubilee’ summed up the reflections that the historic event gave rise to

4. Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, 9

formation approaches and modules. Listening to the prompting of the Spirit shared and developed in faith communities, a variety of faith sharing and faith building styles have evolved over the past few generations in Jesus Youth fellowships and ministries. In this manner the movement has tried its hands on faith formation in a variety of ways, attempting different approaches eventually giving rise to a number of modules.

In a general sense Christ encounter and ensuing faith enrichment take place in multipronged ways in the life of the movement. What are the different approaches to faith building in the movement? i) Faith inspired friendship and informal contacts; ii) cells, team sittings or such other regular meetings; iii) praise and worship, Adorations, Eucharist, and other prayer sessions; iv) retreats or similar ended larger gatherings sometimes called 'meets'; and, v) more structured and clearly oriented Jesus Youth formation programmes. All these fulfil the formative mission of the movement in different ways. While all the previously mentioned faith input approaches are initiatives of more or less area-specific teams enriching the general life of the movement or responding to particular needs and occasions, Jesus Youth formation programmes, in particular, take shape through a process of comprehensive discernment and team work and they have some kind of permanency. A time has come when the whole movement feels a special need to take a closer look at its faith formation programmes and hence in this Year of Faith, these formation approaches are being reviewed in the light of the rich insights from the Magisterium, also taking into consideration the transformations in the movement and in the wider society.

3. Jesus Youth formation has borne rich fruits of personal sanctity and discipline, community upbuilding and mission initiatives. From its initial beginning as a humble initiative, the movement has spread over many countries and cultures, thanks to these formation programmes. In a number of countries the local church has been blessed with committed lay leadership, formed through the fellowships and formation modules of the movement, who readily collaborate and give leadership in the pastoral life of the Church. Evangelizing moves in different life contexts and a variety of mission initiatives have come forth, some of them growing into rich ministries. Over these past years responding to some

deep socio-cultural transformations in the world, newer dynamics and formation modules have also taken shape in the movement. Surely Jesus Youth formation programmes have borne rich fruits.

4. If these are so successful where is the need for a review? The river of life, especially the life of a faith community flows ⁵ requiring greater depth and fruits for nourishment and healing. Continuity, perseverance and on-going deepening are challenges that an effective formation plan has to address. But sometimes shallow and sporadic faith input becomes the misfortune of contemporary times. In the case of many, even earnest and committed Christians, they do not get a chance to go much beyond the initial encounter after their conversion. And the result is a shallow Christian life in relation to personal maturity as well as Christian mission. Yet expectations are high about them, leading to personal frustration and unkind reproach from others. All these point to the need for a comprehensive formation approach in Jesus Youth movement with greater clarity, proper continuity and clearer benchmarking.

In the early days of the movement the main focus was on 'initiation retreats' that led people to a personal encounter with the Lord which launched them to a new life and commitment. And occasional 'conventions' that brought these 'initiated' ones together gave opportunity for a wider vision and some kind of 'enkindling of spirit'. But gradually looking at poor numbers that sustained in the new found commitment, there was serious reflection in the movement on other means of effective follow up. This gradually took the form of personal guidance called 'eldering' and a variety of formation programmes. The movement in general has travelled far ahead from the thinking that gathering people for a retreat and bringing down a skilful preacher would do the magic of faith and the only further need is to repeat the retreat as often as possible. In this context the discussion in the Letter to the Hebrews on the need for "leaving the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity"⁶ is important, as "it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened ... and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit"⁷. The present reflection will offer

5. Rev. 22: 1,2; Ezekiel 47: 1 - 12

6. Heb. 6:1

7. Heb. 6:6

guidance for the movement to chart a clearer path for faith formation, to bring awareness on the need for guidance beyond the encounter and for a Spirit-led sustenance for growth in faith.

Characteristics of the emerging Jesus Youth formation plan

5. Reflecting on the new approaches to faith proclamation in contemporary times, the Lineamenta of the Synodal gathering on New Evangelization speaks on the need for a process of discernment. "The process of evangelization became a process of discernment. Proclamation first requires moments of listening, understanding and interpretation."⁸ Over the past few years at different levels of the movement a process of discernment has been going on about the 'what and how' of Jesus Youth faith formation programmes. Numerous insights have been shared, but the following were expressed as the significant requirements for Jesus Youth formation programmes, all of which have been there in the formation approaches of yester years, but now needed to be consciously cultivated as part of the streamlined formation process of the movement.

i. A formation plan. Faith formation is the distinguishing charism of the Jesus Youth movement and hence a commonly agreed formation process with a longer vision and clearer stages of personal growth is a great need. This is not a few retreats or input sessions but a streamlined life accompaniment in and by a community, making possible a mature life style with the Lord. A formation plan has already taken shape in the movement with five stages or phases of formation.

ii. Specific commitments marking the stages in formation. In each phase of formation the person is prepared for serious decision and pledge, which will be a deepening renewal of the baptismal promise allowing a deeper infilling of the Holy Spirit. This formal commitment will also mark the person's entry into the next phase faith formation as well as deeper commitment in the life of the movement.

8. Lineamenta of Synod of 2012, 3

iii. Jesus Youth identity or a person's membership in it is linked to the formation stage. With its characteristic joy and informality, defining who specifically is a member of the movement has been difficult. Loosely, participation in Jesus Youth fellowship was the norm. With the newly emerging formation plan who a Jesus Youth is will be closely connected to at what phase of formation the person is.

iv. Grass-root formation. The vision of the movement is that every faith community should become a centre of building up of a life style, faith catechesis and proclamation. In the past formation programmes were organised by a higher team, accessible only to a limited number in the movement. The present change is a shifting of formation focus to the foundations and making formation available to everyone in the movement.

v. Comprehensive modules and topics. Faith formation of the movement is all about helping a person understand what one believes and offer help to live it. It helps a person to live fully a life in the Spirit and search and live the will of the Lord. But it has to be much more. It is the movement's formative path to equip a person to be a wholesome individual, active Catholic, committed Jesus Youth and responsible citizen. Progress in personal holiness, emotional maturity and intellectual alertness, warmth in relationships, a healthy objectivity and detachment, developing spiritual and personal effectiveness habits, career and vocation guidance, team functioning, social leadership, mission formation and a variety of other formative approaches will have to be dealt with in this long journey of formation.

vi. Preparing formators. The movement is in need of equipped formators and formation teams at all levels. Effective formation to a large extent relates to the life and culture of formators. Today the movement needs formators having knowledge that He came to call sinners⁹, with compassion that leads to earnest prayer¹⁰, with trust in the often surprising work of the Spirit¹¹, being a faithful and

9. Mt. 9:13

10. Mt. 9:36,38

11. Mt. 10:20, Lk. 12:12

wise steward using one's gifts for others¹² and undertaking the task of speaking the truth in love¹³ so that each of the formees will be formed in the image of the Lord.

vii. Formation in the spirit of communion. The culture of the faith community is linked to faith formation. The model of the Trinity and inspiration of the life of the early Church¹⁴ is the backdrop of faith formation. Friendship and joyful fellowship are strong Jesus Youth characteristics and this should make the difference in JY formation. As the formation of the movement gets more defined, fellowship of those who have taken a commitment in the movement needs to be clearer in order to bear the fruits for formation. "JY Household" will serve this need.

viii. Formation leading to mission. There is a fresh conviction in the movement that enduring mission requires formation and genuine faith formation will lead to fruitful mission. The movement is already rich in mission initiatives, but quite a number of them are short lived after the initial fervour. The proposed formation should help the individuals and communities to be more rooted in faith so that there will be enduring fruits of good ministries and personal initiatives.

The foregoing reflections have been crystalized into a somewhat clear formation plan using which the movement will accompany a person that approaches it, offering sustained guidance from the initial phase of faith life towards greater growth in maturity in Christ.

Towards a five-phased Jesus Youth faith formation plan

6. The journey of faith is also a walk in God's love. The movement comes across a person initially as a seeker for a fuller life, often indirectly asking "what must I do . . ." ¹⁵. In this first Contact Phase the movement attempts to introduce the person to a loving and caring God, guiding them to an encounter with and an experiential knowledge of the Lord. This

12. Lk. 12:4,1Pet. 4:10

13. Eph. 4:15

14. Acts 2:41 - 45

15. Acts 2:37

encounter sets them off on the second Companion Phase when the person receives help to walk in God's love which should lead them to a desire for a more definite commitment. The discipleship commitment that follows makes the person a full-fledged participant in the life of the movement which also launches him or her to the third phase called Committed Phase. In this phase the formee is challenged to 'loving God' or actively responding to God's love.

A missionary life of sharing God's love is the active life to which every Jesus Youth is called. Hence those in the Committed Phase who opt for it receive further guidance and they take a missionary commitment, which leads them to the fourth Confirmed Phase. Here the stress is on sharing the love of God. The fifth, Covenant Phase envisages the setting apart of certain well-formed and mature Jesus Youth to form others in the work of God's love.

7. This process of faith formation is a spiritual journey with a phased guidance and a crossing of threshold to enter each phase. It is interesting to find an image of this in the layered 'court' arrangement of the ancient Jewish 'tabernacle' starting with the 'Court of Gentiles' leading finally to 'the Holy of Holies'. In the Lineamenta of the Synod of Bishops on New Evangelization the Pope's words are referred to as he talks on the need of this phased leading of today's generation: "I think that today too the Church should open a sort of "Court of the Gentiles" in which people might in some way latch on to God, without knowing him and before gaining access to his mystery, at whose service the inner life of the Church stands."¹⁶ The movement of the people of Old Testament from the Court of Gentiles passing through the Inner Court, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies becomes an image of the spiritual journey of a young person from the Contact Phase through Companion, Commitment phases to the Confirmed phase pointing towards the Covenant phase. Each court was separated by a door and passing the door was a significant step in one's progress in holiness. In the present plan the commitment ceremony or a solemn pledge will mark the transition from one stage of spiritual journey to another. Perhaps a major departure from the OT image to contemporary reality is that in the former the journey of holiness was

16. Lineamenta, Synod of Bishops: XIII Ordinary General Assembly, 5

thought to be going away from wider society and the world, but in the contemporary faith formation a Jesus Youth is equipped to go out into the world as a witness to be the light and leaven in the wider world.

8. With a view to help a person journey effectively through their pilgrimage of faith Jesus Youth movement envisages a five-phased faith instruction plan, lending help to grow in holiness and mission. These phases are: i) Contact Phase, ii) Companion Phase, iii) Committed Phase, iv) Confirmed Phase, and v) Covenant Phase. Here someone may ask, why think of phases when so far we had been thinking of faith content and what content to cover in a programme. These surely are not categories of people, but generalised stages of a person's walk with the Lord and progress in the life and mission of Jesus Youth movement. This is with a view to provide multipronged assistance for sustained spiritual growth of a person. Such clarity is an urgent need of the day not just for the person's progress in holiness and mission, but also for the effectiveness of life in the movement as well as for fulfilling the movement's specific mission in the Church and society. To view each of these phases:

i. **Contact Phase** is a stage when a person comes to know about the movement, attracted to its fellowship and becomes aware of the faith journey possible in the movement. Perhaps more than in any other period, today there is a need to reach out and to say "Come"¹⁷ in a non-threatening manner to those in need of Christ's love. How does Jesus Youth offer this call to a newcomer? Friendly contacts by those who are active in the movement, encouragement by well-wishers, some of the contact programmes like 'come and see sessions', 'encounter programmes', art and culture events, social outreaches, etc. often welcome people to begin a journey with the movement. In a newcomer the movement finds a seeker with a desire for a closer relationship with God and also with a need for loving fellowship. To meet this need he will be invited to Jesus Youth fellowships or prayer groups and also to some orientation sessions. After a time of initial walk, the movement will invite the person to an Encounter Session which will provide 'Conversion Experience' or "Baptism in the Holy Spirit". This first commitment to the Lord or renewal of Baptism becomes a turning point in the person's life,

17. Rev. 22:17

which in turn launches one into an active companionship with the Lord as well as with the movement. This becomes a milestone and will lead the person to the next phase in faith formation.

ii. Companion Phase finds a person's gradual growth in relationship with the Lord and getting introduced to the life and culture of the movement. This is a period of a newfound joy and celebration in life with an experience of a fresh walk in the Spirit. The joy of praising the Lord finds its fuller expression in a Jesus Youth prayer group. But doubts, bouts of spiritual dryness and a variety of temptations will cause setbacks and sometimes make the person a 'drop out'. The movement at this phase provides personal support, fellowship and a phased faith input to help the seed of faith to gradually grow. One is progressively introduced to the movement's 'Itinerary of Holiness' as well as Jesus Youth lifestyle. After a period of steady growth in faith as well as in Jesus Youth fellowship the person will be introduced to the possibility of a regular commitment in the movement. If one is desirous, one will be enlisted in a focused formation ending with a solemn commitment ceremony. This pledge is also towards a regular life in the movement, making the person a full member of Jesus Youth. And this will take the person to the next phase in the movement.

iii. Committed Phase marks the person's regular membership in the Jesus Youth movement, committed to the 'six pillars' and participation in its regular fellowship, "JY Household". At this stage the person deepens their call to discipleship and is accountable to the movement and the movement in turn is responsible to guide, form and support the person. Other than the meetings in the Households, specially arranged faith input and guidance sessions will help the person grow in life with the Lord as well as being a member in the movement. Periodic recommitment will also nourish and sustain this commitment. After a period of advancement in the walk with the movement the person will be introduced to the possibility of formally confirming the commitment. If the person is desirous they will undergo a guided preparation ending with a formal confirmation of their commitment, which in turn will lead the Jesus Youth to the next phase of formation.

iv. Confirmed Phase finds a Jesus Youth set apart for Christian service and mission, and he or she is helped to assume leadership responsibilities in the movement, the Church and the world. The call to be sent out as a missionary has a very specific meaning at this phase. With long period of steady formation and commitment and helped to discover their specific mission and distinguishing charisms these will provide mature leadership for the movement as well as for wider society. It is the responsibility of the movement to make available relevant guidance and faith input responding to the signs of the times and guidance of the mother Church.

v. Covenant Phase envisages calling and setting apart a few of the mature Confirmed members for specific responsibilities inside or outside the movement. More than any initiative by the members this setting apart is a discernment and invitation by the movement leadership keeping in mind the emerging needs of the movement and the Church. Equipping them, providing sustained support for a higher call and ensuring mutual care among these mature ministers become the special responsibility of the movement.

9. While all tools of character formation, faith up-building, skill development and mission motivation become relevant in these phased Jesus Youth faith formation, the Bible and Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) will assume special significance. To study as well as to live the Word the Church specially recommends the approach of *Lectio Divina*. Jesus Youth Prayer provides a very fruitful format of prayer and Bible reflection for individuals as well as for community. Catechism is surely a rich source of instruction, as Pope John Paul II remarks:

A catechism should faithfully and systematically present the teaching of Sacred Scripture, the living Tradition of the Church and the authentic Magisterium, as well as the spiritual heritage of the Fathers and the Church's saints, to allow for a better knowledge of the Christian mystery and for enlivening the faith of the People of God. It should take into account the doctrinal statements which down the centuries the Holy Spirit has intimated to his Church. It

should also help illumine with the light of faith the new situations and problems which had not yet emerged in the past¹⁸.

The input from the CCC is to be used at all phases of the formation giving emphasis on the four different parts of the Catechism, namely, 1. What Catholics believe and why, 2. How Catholics celebrate the mysteries of the faith. 3. How Catholics are to live and 4. How they should pray.

The words of Pope John Paul II finds resonance in the objective of the proposed formation plan of the movement: "One solid cause of hope [for a new springtime of Christian life in Asia] is the increasing number of better trained, enthusiastic and Spirit-filled lay people, who are more and more aware of their specific vocation within the ecclesial community."¹⁹ The earnest hope of the movement is that this path of guided faith input will result in such enlightened missionaries in the ecclesial community.

Laying the foundation for the emerging process of formation

10. In this Year of Faith Jesus Youth movement discerns a prompting of the Spirit to recast its faith formation process. Like education, faith formation could also be looked upon a single handed and sporadic effort, of a master forming a disciple at his will. But Jesus when he formed the Church and sent out his disciples²⁰ on the mission of reaching out to the ends of the earth and building others in faith, envisioned a continuing process of faith formation and a wholesome ecclesial mission. Today we realize that for a mature and continuing faith formation process there has to be i) a shared comprehensive vision of formation, ii) people set apart to impart formation, iii) a defined faith content or clarity on what and how to teach iv) a lively community and culture forming the context of formation and v) an evangelistic mission that flows from the formation.

18. John Paul II. *Fedei Depositum*. On the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

19. John Paul II. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 9.

20. Mt. 28:19

11. With this in background, there are certain areas that the movement as a whole and its leadership at different levels, in particular, have to focus on so that this time of Grace will bear rich fruits of faith in the movement's life and mission:

a. Building up a vision on faith formation: Preparing the movement as well as its leadership at all levels to understand, accept and implement the new formation approach and all that it implies is the first foundation that has to be laid. Maybe there is need to convince some on the need for a longer and clearer plan of formation, without which programmes will suit only available leaders or immediate challenges, seldom ensuring lasting roots or fruits. Over the years the Jesus Youth movement has crystallised its vision on formation and the time has come for disseminating the same to different levels in order to initiate a process of implementing the vision and plan of formation.

b. Preparing formation teams: Formation teams are not new to the movement, but in this emerging new approach these teams will have a greater responsibility and so they will have to be selected and prepared for this task with a new vision and care. So far, in the movement, formation responsibilities were shared in the co-ordinating teams itself. But now the leadership will have find people who know very well and live the culture and vision of the Jesus Youth movement, faithful to the mentality of the Church as well as mature in the dynamics of formation. Networking and providing on-going updating of the formators will also be the new responsibility of the movement.

c. Getting formation modules ready: The Year of Faith also marks the Jubilee of the Second Vatican Council and the 20th year of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the two important milestones in clarifying the content of faith formation in these changing times. The Year of Faith thus signals to the movement the need for growing clarity not only on what is given during formation but also on the manner and pace of faith accompaniment. This should result in the preparation of faith formation modules taking care of the content as well as the way in which it is communicated. The variety of age groups and cultural realities, gender and state of life differences will surely demand a range of packaging and adaptations.

d. Life in JY Households: Redemptoris Missio speaks²¹ of the pastoral significance of groups that are “centres for Christian formation and missionary outreach”. In the movement this has always received priority. While Jesus Youth Prayer Groups, with the evangelistic dynamism, open themselves more and more to people of Contact and Companion phases, JY Households should become forums of the Committed and Confirmed in the movement to “come together for prayer, Scripture reading, catechesis, and discussion on human and ecclesial problems with a view to a common commitment”²². Use of Jesus Youth Prayer and, wherever possible, gathering around the Eucharistic Table will help JY Households to enter deeply into the pace of the life of the Church. Grass-roots formation has been pointed out as the need of the hour in the movement. Effective JY Households are surely the answer to this.

e. Ensuring a vibrant life and fruitful mission: Life style of a person is closely linked to one’s mission and vice versa. In the movement there is constant reminder to the “Six Pillars” or an itinerary of holiness required in everyone’s life. Faith formation in the movement is also for such habit development. This in turn results in a life of effective Christian witness. It is through faith formation one receives guidance for effective living bearing fruits of evangelistic ministries. While bringing about changes in its approach to formation the movement should make sure that these goals of mission are more effectively achieved through the changes.

Words and styles change, but some treasures remain

12. We hear people feeling irritable about expressions, in the manner of someone listing words that should be banished from Church vocabulary²³ as they have already ceased to express the real intent. Surely words become clichés and programme styles become outdated and hence unbearable. Yet with the power of the Spirit and sincerity of the proclaimers, the Word of the Lord²⁴ will provide sustenance and guidance in every generation. All the same, we need to ask if wineskins²⁵

21. John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio, 51

22. John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio, 51

23. <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/features/2012/09/20/my-banned-list-of-10-church-buzzwords/>

24. Mt. 24:35

25. Mt. 9:17

are keeping the wine and human words and formation styles are imparting the dynamism of the Spirit to the people around. Time and again our words and styles need renewal and replacement, yet never losing the power of the ever-living Word, rather being faithful to the dynamism of the movement of the Spirit. This is a time of grace for the movement, when Jesus Youth is taking a leap forward responding to the call of the Lord and placing all trust in His providence. May this renewal of formation styles that Jesus Youth undertakes in this Year of Faith help the movement accompany this generation more effectively, listening to the Spirit and walking under the guidance of the Lord.

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