

And despite the pressures, many families continue to be a domestic church. They offer an experience of love, faithfulness and God. They are clear about their values and beliefs. But some other families doubt their ability to hand on faith and they can feel crushed by the expectations and pressures of society. Similarly, in some places, our parishes have provided excellent opportunities for people of all ages to experience involvement in the life, ministry and liturgy of the community. In other places there is less of that experience of belonging and of being needed. Indeed greater mobility and student life mean that the parish is no longer widely seen as a key element in identity. However, groups and movements are now springing up throughout the Church and these can provide a context in which people feel rooted, and enabled to grow in the journey of faith. We welcome and encourage any of these initiatives that promote a healthy spirituality of communion.

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All human beings yearn to belong, to be recognised, to see justice, to make meaning in their lives and to feel that they are on a spiritual journey of growth. But not all 'spiritual' responses are helpful. We are also aware that some groups can exploit young people, particularly at vulnerable times in their lives. The Gospel of Jesus is directed at healing and wholeness, freeing people through grace to belong and serve. Any movement that does not support that is not healthy.

Furthermore, there are examples of spiritual searching having a rather narrow focus. Some people promote self-fulfilment as a goal for spiritual

courageous decisions. For – though our society proposes simple solutions for many things – growth, solidarity and hope do not come cheap. Pope Benedict XVI, speaking at his inauguration and quoting his predecessor, said:

Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? Do we not then risk ending up diminished and deprived of our freedom? No! If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation.

If we stand for nothing, we may fall for anything. Do not be afraid to choose the way of Jesus. Do not be afraid to believe in love, hope and forgiveness. Autonomy, being able to do what I want, may be attractive. But only the truth will set us free (John 8:32). That is the guarantee of the Good News.

4. Independence or interdependence?

But that friendship and that liberation cannot be a solitary journey. Loneliness and fickle relationships sap our energy. They can create self-doubt. We all need to belong to communities where we find brothers and sisters on the journey. Building faith in people takes time.

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development. But the message of the Christian scriptures is that we are invited to know self-transcendence through the grace of God's Spirit in our lives. We cannot save ourselves with our own resources alone. An approach centred merely on self-fulfilment will lead to a shallow understanding of our deepest needs and end in self-indulgence.

3. The Gospel is Good News

It would be wrong to see the problems of building faith in young people as some sort of insurmountable obstacle. This changed and changing period in our history is a challenging and exciting time to be in the Church. Speaking in Knock during his Irish visit in 1979, Pope John Paul II said 'Every generation, with its own mentality and characteristics, is like a new continent to be won for Christ.' Every generation invites people of faith to put out into the deep (Luke 5:4). Whatever the challenges, the disciples of Jesus are called to proclaim the Gospel to every culture and in a language which offers hope and salvation.

The Gospel means, and is, 'Good News', and there is much medical and other evidence to show that belief in God is not something unhealthy or childish. Statistically speaking, those who believe in God live longer and are better able to cope with the burdens of life! Faith in the God of love and forgiveness is good for the here and now as well as for the hereafter.

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That should not come as a surprise, for the Christian revelation speaks of dignity, liberation and hope in Jesus. The Christian message about the Trinity remains a very simple one.

That means that the Church has to provide support for all of us who are pilgrims in a pilgrim people, moving from slavery to freedom. We acknowledge that the traditional Church structures did not always reach out to, and listen to young people. That ministry needs investment in terms of money and personnel. In an age when we are bombarded with all sorts of messages and pressures, the Gospel needs to be proclaimed loudly and clearly so that it can be heard. Young people need positive, safe space to build up their self-confidence, to sustain their vision and to celebrate their hope.

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An explicit ministry to young people is an essential, not an optional extra. That ministry cannot be uniform. People have different needs and we must reach out by providing a full 'cycle of care'. Some hunger for spiritual support. Others have had little experience of spiritual nourishment. Others are disinterested or burdened by pain and guilt – for many have grown up with suffering or abuse. The experience of being bullied is widespread. This can happen on the basis of race, disability, gender, sexual orientation or social class.

Any such victimisation of individuals or groups is unacceptable and to be condemned. These all make it difficult for people to believe in a God who believes in them. Everyone has the right to hear the Good News, wherever they are on life's journey.

Our Catholic schools have been the result of huge generosity and commitment on the part of thousands of people over generations. Education was provided for millions when the state could not or would not provide it. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to these people – lay, religious and clergy. But we have to re-examine

- We are all made in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:26) and that is the source of our dignity and solidarity.
- And even when we made such a mess of the world, God still so loved the world that he gave his only Son (John 3:16). That Jesus took away the power of sin over the world, and by His Resurrection proclaimed that there is more goodness in the world than evil. Thus forgiveness and a fresh start are available to everyone who turns to Jesus.
- And our bodies are Temples of God's Holy Spirit (Cf. Romans 8:9-13). Through that Spirit we can call God Abba, Father. (Rom 8:14-16). That is the source of our convictions about justice and sexual morality.

The journey of faith is one that lasts for all of our lives. It is not merely a one-off event, but a process. Jesus asked for followers who would take up their cross and follow him. He did not just ask for occasional customers browsing in his spiritual services catalogue!

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It takes time to know the Father, to see Jesus as our Saviour and to know the power of the Spirit. It takes time for each of us to bring our own story to the scriptures so that we can believe in the unconditional love of God in the specific circumstances of our individual and communal lives.

That is not an easy journey. It involves making sometimes difficult choices. It will require

what role our schools can play in an increasingly pluralist society. When we see how much faith-based schools are in demand in most other countries, we must ensure that we are offering a Catholic education to all and not just a good secular education for ethnic Catholics. And we are committed to resisting the pressures that would seek to replace the education of the whole person with little more than job training.

In many places the traditional model of parish is under serious pressure. Priests sometimes feel exhausted and unable to cope with the huge demands on their time. For they too live and work in an anxious and frenetic society. But Pope John Paul II called on the Church in Europe to serve Christ and the world by proclaiming and celebrating the Gospel of hope, and by serving the Gospel of love (*Ecclesia in Europa*, 2003). To do this he said that 'our Christian communities must become genuine schools of prayer' (*Novo Millennio Ineunte NMI*, 2001, para. 33). And our parishes have to aim at promoting a spirituality of communion wherever individuals and Christians are formed. (*NMI* 43). That provides us with a huge challenge.

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The most important focal point for this promotion of individual and community holiness is the **Sunday Mass**. There we gather to hear the Word of God proclaimed, and through the Eucharist to share in Christ's victory over sin and death. We gather as His people, not so much because we want to do something for God, but because the Lord invites us to enter into the mystery of salvation. The Sunday Mass is not intended to be either pure entertainment or a mere duty. It is a call to recognise who God is and who

1. A Changing Country

Twenty years have passed since the last time the Bishops of Ireland wrote on the subject of young people. Much has changed since then, in both the Republic and Northern Ireland. Young Irish people are now growing up in an environment where their skills are in great demand, at home and abroad. The spectre of civil strife or enforced emigration no longer hangs over us. Ireland has been enjoying unprecedented economic growth. Irish cultural and sporting icons are known world wide. This is an island where many people have great self-confidence and the financial resources to enjoy many things, undreamed of a generation ago. At home young people are studying and working alongside people from a wide range of racial, cultural and religious backgrounds. A few decades ago the Irish abroad included many who were either seeking employment or working as missionaries far from home. Nowadays, they are more likely to be business people and skilled professionals in the global economy, or travellers in a shrinking world. The level of expectations has changed out of all recognition.

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But there are also negative sides to the changes. Increasing wealth for many has been accompanied by greater divisions and tensions in society. Scandals have led many to mistrust major institutions in society. Fear of crime is a reality of life for many individuals and communities. A glance at the daily news makes it clear that Ireland has become an increasingly dangerous country in which to live. Many young people are losing their lives through accidents, assaults and suicide. The abuse of addictive substances such as alcohol and narcotics has taken a heavy toll. As in many other Western countries, there is a growing level of

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we are – as individuals and as communities of faith. It is an invitation to enter into the mystery of living and dying, betrayal and love, mistakes and forgiveness, despair and hope – for all of this is encapsulated in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Our communities are parts of the Body of Christ. Within these communities, people have a whole range of talents and God-given gifts. The new influx of people from other cultures can provide new insights into how we might be parish. A healthy parish will be able to utilise many of these gifts to build up the Body of Christ. Many parishes and faith groups have enabled people to develop their contribution to the work of Christ. But there is an increasing reluctance to enter into committed relationships for life. As Bishops we wish to encourage young men and women to actively consider whether they have a **vocation** to the priestly ministry or to religious life. A Church centred on the Eucharist is impoverished if it does not have ministers to celebrate the Mass and the other sacraments. A Church based on communion with one another and with God in Christ needs those who will dedicate their whole life to communities of prayer and service.

For some people, **marriage** is no longer the sacred institution that it once was. Commercial pressures have put the cost of marriage ceremonies beyond the reach of growing numbers of people. But we all need stability and trust if we are to grow and mature. Young people, despite what you hear and see in some quarters, do not be afraid to believe in the possibility of love and faithfulness. Commitment is not a trap. It can offer space to flourish, despite – and because of – the challenges it presents. Married couples are invited to reflect faithful Christ's love for his Church (Ephesians 5:21-33), and help us all have faith in the God who is love (1 John 4:8).

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disengagement from the mainstream political processes. War, terrorism and environmental catastrophes are said to loom just over the horizon. For young people growing up and seeking their rightful place, this can be a beautiful and frightening world at one and the same time.

As bishops we ask, what is it about the structures of power and the ideology of our modern culture that produces so much antagonism and dysfunctionality?

From some quarters we hear a common refrain that labels and condemns 'young people' as being responsible for much bad behaviour. That is very unfair. It is true that numbers of our youth do end up in trouble with society and the law. We have a right to expect responsible conduct from everybody. But as Bishops we ask, what is it about the structures of power and the ideology of our modern culture that produces so much antagonism and dysfunctionality? Who in the adult world is benefiting from a culture that promotes self-indulgence and encourages us to see ourselves merely as consumers on a never-ending treadmill? We believe that there is something wrong with a society that feels obliged to jail more and more of our youth. We believe that we have failed our young people when there is a growing assumption that nothing will last long, that life is only about accumulating experiences and that each individual has to create their own world of meaning in the midst of chaos. That insecurity will not build faith in anything – and it can easily lead to alienation, depression and addiction.

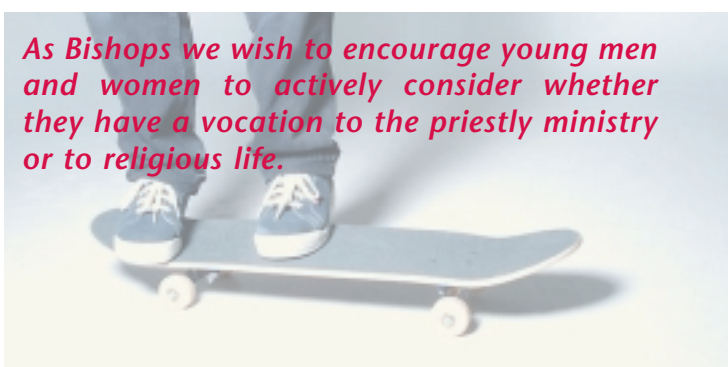
As we seek to face these challenges, we acknowledge that, for many people, the institutional Church – which played a key role in Irish society for many generations – has been seriously compromised by scandals. While most local clergy and communities still retain high levels of trust, the organisation has lost the

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5. Conclusion

As the 20th World Youth Day approaches, hundreds of thousands of young people will be preparing to travel to Germany. The theme for this year's event is 'We have come to worship Him' (Mt 2:2), words spoken by the Magi who came looking for Jesus. Wise people have always looked for Jesus, even when the journey was not easy. They still do. The Jesus of Bethlehem, Galilee, the Cross and the Resurrection wants all of us to have life and to have it to the full (Jn 10:10). As a Church, we are called by Jesus to build up faith – people's faith in God and faith in themselves. It is in acknowledging Jesus as our Lord, Saviour and Brother that we will find that faith. It is in prayer to Jesus that we will discover our true identity and the meaning of our life. It is in discovering the wonder of the Creator that we will recognise the dignity of the creature. Do not be afraid to open the doors of your life to Christ!

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Further information on World Youth Day is available from the following websites:

www.catholiccommunications.ie/wyd2005

www.vatican.va

www.wjt2005.de



www.veritas.ie

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confidence of a substantial number of people. Some have just drifted away from active membership of Church. For others, religious belief seems irrelevant. For most young people, growing up still involves formal sacramental membership of the Church through First Communion and Confirmation. But where parish, school, home and society are not speaking the same language, lots of people remain without much idea of the core teachings about God, Jesus and salvation. Many feel unable to have a serious discussion about their faith and doubt. Religious illiteracy is growing. Our Church community has to accept responsibility for its failures in this regard.

2. Authenticity

It is true that a number of people are positively antagonistic to the Church and would wish to remove religion from any influence in their individual or social lives. However, all surveys suggest that most Irish people of all ages still retain a strong sense of idealism and of spiritual hunger. We are a people with a long spiritual tradition. Growing numbers of lay people are studying theology and related courses. The events surrounding the death of Pope John Paul II and the election of Pope Benedict XVI were followed with great respect and interest. Young Irish people continue to give huge support to World Youth Day and to groups working in Lourdes or in developing countries. There is a strong awareness of ecological and justice issues. Even among those at school, meditation and prayer exercises are very positively received. There remains a deep desire for authenticity and for spiritual experiences that touch their hearts. Young people do not always find that in adults and in our faith communities.

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BUILDING FAITH IN YOUNG PEOPLE

**A Message from the
Catholic Bishops of
Ireland to mark the
20th World Youth Day
event**

**Cologne, Germany
16-21 August 2005**

**'We have come to
worship Him'
(Mt 2:2)**



WORLD YOUTH DAY