



ROMAN CATHOLIC  
**DIOCESE**  
**OF CHARLESTON**

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**Strategic Plan for Young Adult Ministry**  
**2020-2025**



## **Preface**

The following Strategic Plan for Young Adult Ministry was inspired and directed by the guidelines set forth by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in *Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults*.

The Strategic Plan was additionally shaped by the counsel of a Diocesan Committee of priests, religious sisters, young adults, and ministers from across the Diocese representing a variety of parishes and Diocesan departments. The committee was mindful of the declining number of young adult Catholics attending Mass and the increasing number of young adults with no religious affiliation. But every member of the committee had fruitful, hopeful contributions that helped shape a vision of how the Catholic Church of South Carolina can welcome a generation back to their spiritual home. And under the direction of the Vicar General, this plan and mission of Young Adult Ministry was presented before priests at several deanery meetings across the Diocese.

## **Mission**

To build strong communities of Young Adults who are in love with Jesus Christ and who are committed to serving Him in the Church and in the world.

## **Vision**

To integrate Catholic young adults into parish life by nourishing them spiritually, engaging them socially, and building communities of service.

## **Philosophy**

Young Adult Ministry seeks to connect young adults with:

- Jesus Christ
- the Church as a welcoming Christian Community
- the Mission of the Church in the World
- and a Peer Community where Faith is nurtured and strengthened.

We believe with the words of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI that “being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” ([\*Deus Caritas Est\*](#))

To realize the mission of holiness, we seek to work with the Holy Spirit in calling young adults into a relationship with Jesus Christ, by striving to nourish their hearts, minds and souls in providing them with the necessary resources and opportunities. The goals from these opportunities include: meaningful experiences of the liturgy, developing a deep prayer life, learning more about faith, and sharing individual God-given gifts with the Church.

## **History**

Young Adult Ministry for the Diocese of Charleston was developed under the Office of Youth Ministry in 2012. Regional groups were established in areas with higher concentrations of Catholic parishes. Under the name of Lucis Via, the ministry quickly became a spiritual home for Catholics in Charleston, Columbia, and Greenville to come together for prayer, retreats, recreation, and fellowship.

Over the years, a need grew in the community to connect the young adults into the life of a parish. And in 2017, with the permission of the pastors and Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, Young Adult Ministry transitioned to a parish-based organizational structure. The regional groups began transitioning into local parishes, and parishes that formerly did not have young adult ministries began to develop them. Now, with 20 parish-based young adult ministries across the Diocese, we are thankful to build upon our past and look forward to the new opportunities to share the gospel with young adults and invite them into a relationship with the Lord.

## **Role of the Diocese**

- Establish policies and guidelines to help the Young Adult Ministry thrive
- Develop and share the vision and mission of the ministry
- Provide resources and support to the parish-based Young Adult Ministry groups
- Provide opportunities to help young adults grow in holiness and build community at a Diocesan level, including, but not limited to: retreats, mission trips, pilgrimages, or social events.
- Establish and assist in maintaining communication with Young Adult Ministries across the Diocese

In addition, the Associate Director of Young Adult Ministry follows the leadership of the Director of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry, and:

- Carries out the vision of the Bishop and regularly informs him on the health and progress of the ministry
- Coordinates Diocesan Young Adult events
- Trains, equips, and builds relationships with the young adult leadership across the Diocese
- Serves as a liaison between the young adult communities and the Diocese of Charleston.

## Challenges

It is crucial to understand the unique challenges inherent to Young Adult Ministry in order to develop a successful program. These challenges are often not limited to young Catholics, nor limited to just the young adults in South Carolina. But recognizing the needs of the community is imperative to ministering to all young adults: those who may not currently identify as Catholic, those who are already active in a parish or ministry, and those of Hispanic, African-American, and Asian-Pacific Island decent.

Based upon the observations discussed during the Diocesan Young Adult Strategic Plan Committee meetings, young adulthood is characterized by major life transitions. Whether they are students, young professionals, discerning vocation, or geographically moving away from family, young adults are often undergoing significant change and discovering new independence. And while it is important that they have the freedom to build a life of their own, the lack of consistency and community can be detrimental to their overall wellbeing. These transitions could contribute to disconnection with family and old friends, a regression in the spiritual life, or lacking a sense of self or sense of belonging.

Additionally, the Strategic Plan Committee also noted the challenges in ministering to the young adults that are already participating in the life of a parish or Young Adult Ministry. While it is important to effectively plan and communicate ministry events, attendance and numbers may not accurately reflect the health of a Young Adult Ministry; young adults can come to retreats, socials, or service projects and still may not have a personal relationship with Jesus. Similarly, young adults may be present in the pews on Sunday, but still feel disconnected or unwelcomed in the Church. They are much less likely to be engaged in the life of the parish and are more likely to stop attending Mass altogether.

## **Overview of the Strategic Plan**

Mindful of the vision, mission, history, and challenges of Young Adult Ministry in the Diocese of Charleston, the Office of Young Adult Ministry presents these goals to aid in the development, growth, and expansion of this ministry for the years 2020-2025.

This Strategic Plan is constructed of 6 goals that continue the vision and the mission of Young Adult Ministry, and each goal is supported by desired outcomes that describe how our Diocesan Ministry can best achieve its goals. These Goals and Desired Outcomes were developed by the Strategic Plan Committee and were finalized by the Director and Associate Director of Young Adult Ministry.

## **Goal 1: Evangelization**

To support young adults as they grow in their relationship with Christ by providing opportunities for initial encounter, continued discipleship, and vocation discernment.

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind’. This is the greatest and first commandment.” (Matthew 22:38)*

The first goal of this ministry must be to help support our young adults come to know Jesus as Lord and to support them as they commit their lives to Him. Much of the ministry is currently structured assuming that young adults have had a personal encounter with Christ and are committed to serving Him. While there are several young disciples in our Diocese who are passionately in love with Jesus, that is not always the case.

Recognizing the need of evangelization to a generation of young adults, this ministry must include opportunities to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to invite young adults into a relationship with Him. It is the primary mission of this ministry, so it must also be the primary goal of this strategic plan.

### **Desired Outcomes:**

- 1) To have the young adult ministries meet at least monthly and provide opportunities for young adults to grow spiritually, intellectually, personally, or pastorally.
  - a) These meetings could include a variety of prayer forms, Scripture study, service opportunities, book study, discussion, or speaker presentations reflecting the four pillars of formation.
  - b) All materials used during formation should be recommended under the guidance of the pastor or Associate Director of Young Adult Ministry to ensure they are in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church and suit the spiritual needs of the young adult ministry.

Each parish and young adult ministry will have different gifts, talents, interests, and charisms and similarly, they will all have a variety of scheduled opportunities to meet. Having all parish young adult ministries gather at least monthly ensures that there is still regularity and consistency that is necessary for building community. And including meetings that reflect all or one of the four pillars of formation will better help them to come to know Jesus, grow as an individual, and find new life within the Church.

- 2) To coordinate at least 2 retreats annually that provide a prayerful atmosphere that guide young adults in their relationship with God.
- a) Fall Retreat: An evangelization retreat that includes sessions about the Kerygma, testimonies, and missionary discipleship for young adults to encounter Christ or renew that encounter with Him.
  - b) Spring Retreat: A retreat for spiritual growth that explores themes related to spirituality, Scripture, lives of the saints, or other topics developed by the Associate Director that best supports young adults to actively follow Christ.

The annual young adult retreats have always been a central part of the Diocesan ministry. The retreat attendants come from a variety of spiritual backgrounds; from cradle Catholics, to recent converts, and mature disciples, so many young people come from across the state and look forward to the retreats every year. The retreats are open to all and should provide a welcoming atmosphere regardless of where young adults are spiritually. A cycle of themes can provide more structure for the ministry to ensure that we are both evangelizing and helping disciples grow in their relationship with God.

- 3) To introduce a Discernment Retreat organized in conjunction with the Diocese of Charleston Office of Vocations and thereafter offer the retreat annually.

The idea for this new retreat was brought to the discussion during the second strategic plan committee. The themes, speakers, and spiritual exercises would be planned in conjunction with the Vocations Office and would be designed to help young adults learn about how to pray and discern well. Young adults need to be open to God's call in all aspects of their lives, as well as in actively choosing a vocation. The retreat would reflect a variety of spiritualities and practices, have time for personal, silent reflection and spiritual direction, and have resources about vocations to the priesthood, religious life, consecrated single life, or Christian marriage should a young adult desire to continue their discernment to a specific vocation.

- 4) To offer young adults the resources they need for vocational discernment such as information about Come and See retreats, religious orders, or the contact information for certified spiritual directors in South Carolina.

While most opportunities and resources for discernment would come from the Office of Vocations and the Office for Spirituality and Formation for Ministry, the Office of Young Adults is often the first point of contact between the Diocese and young Catholics and should share the resources from these offices.

## **Goal 2: Leadership Development**

To recognize the leaders within the parish young adult groups and provide them with resources and training to best prepare them for outreach, evangelization, and development of young adult disciples.

*“Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.” (1 Timothy 4:12)*

Leadership development is the link between the Diocese and the young adults across South Carolina; the way the Diocese builds and forms young adult leaders changes the way that they lead and serve the young Church. The leaders hold a special role in peer leadership that serves both as a mentor and as a friend with different responsibilities within each parish.

However, the young adult leaders are charged with the same responsibility to build relationships within their communities and bringing young Catholics closer to Christ. While the ministry is a blessing, it can be a challenge; effective leadership cannot be sustained when the leader is not enthusiastic or committed, nor can it rely solely on one person, creating an organization dependent on the individual and is not sustainable beyond his or her efforts. It is crucial for the Diocese to provide leadership training and resources for the ministry to flourish under the grace of God.

### **Desired Outcomes:**

- 1) To coordinate at least one annual retreat and one annual workshop that includes training in the following formation areas:
  - a) Spiritual: Evangelization, personal prayer, sharing the Kerygma and personal testimonies
  - b) Pastoral: Review the Pastoral Care Plan, plan service opportunities, Diversity and inclusion training (*further outlined in Desired Outcomes 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3*)
  - c) Intellectual: include talks or book studies on theology, Scripture, and other special topics
  - d) Human: Hospitality, Strengths Inventories, Technology and Social Media best practices and policies (including Zoom facilitation)

The retreat, held in the late summer or early fall, would be a weekend engagement with all of the leaders in the Diocese. While trying to accommodate the schedules of our volunteers, the retreat is mandatory for the leaders, simply because of the importance of the subject matter. The retreat is also open to those young adults who might not be an “official” leader but are still interested in strengthening their spiritual lives and

developing leadership skills. However, a weekend-long, out-of-town retreat with strangers could intimidate potential, burgeoning leaders. Offering a workshop-style retreat for a day that is devoted to leadership development can encourage upcoming leaders, as well as renew and strengthen the vision for ministry for active leaders.

- 2) To have the leaders in each deanery meet with the Associate Director quarterly for prayer, formation, and to share successes and areas for growth.

While the Leadership retreats and workshops are the primary channels for leadership development, additional meetings with the Diocese can help facilitate growth and outreach. Troubleshooting, brainstorming, and sharing the successes or “glory stories” as a team with the other young adult leaders from the deanery can help leadership learn from each other and communicate the overall health of the region with the Associate Director of Young Adult Ministry.

These meetings can occur at homes, apartments, churches, or public spaces like coffeeshops or even digitally. If there is only one active Young Adult Ministry in the deanery, the leadership is invited to have individual meetings with the Associate Director or join the meeting in another region.

- 3) To frequently communicate with the pastors and vicars across the Diocese with information about Young Adult Ministry and report on its growth by visiting each deanery once a year.

Even if there is not a young adult ministry active at a parish, there could still be great potential. Regular updates via Caritas or sending bi-annual emails to pastors in key areas in the Diocese helps recognize the potential for a young adult group at a parish and identify potential leaders.

### **Goal 3: Parish Life**

To invite and welcome young adults into fuller participation in the life of their parish in order to deepen their identity as Catholic Christians, but more importantly, as beloved sons and daughters of God.

*“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles...They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:42-43, 46-47)*

According to both Gallop Polls and the Pew Research Center, it is estimated that 25% of Catholics in their 20’s attend Mass at least weekly. With unprecedented numbers of young Catholics dissociating from the Church, it can be easy for priests, ministers, and parishioners to despair at the absence of a generation. However, this provides an opportunity for priests, ministers, and other laity to reexamine how they recognize and welcome young Catholics back into the Church.

#### **Desired Outcomes:**

- 1) To have at least 75% of the young adults active in Young Adult Ministry registered as a member of a parish.

The ultimate mission of this ministry is to bring young adults into a relationship with Jesus, and this relationship is best supported by the life of a parish. Participation in the Sacraments and holding an active role in a community of faith can transform the life of not just a young adult, but also the life of the Church.

- 2) To have priests and young adult leadership at each parish organize intentional outreach to young adults in the parish during seasons with greater Mass attendance, such as Ash Wednesday, or days with more irregular attendance, such as Holy Days of Obligation.

Invitations from peers and priests can have a huge influence on a young person’s spiritual life, and it is important the young adult leaders encourage their priests and other parishioners to welcome new young adults and connect them with the parish ministry. This can be strategically done during times when more young adult Catholics attend Mass, such as Ash Wednesday, Christmas, and Holy Week.

- 3) To have at least 50% of our young adult groups have a representative to their parish council or other parish leadership organization.

Young adults have enormous potential to be leaders in their parishes. Their love for the faith and perspective from their generation make them excellent candidates to serve on parish council and help plan ways to welcome other young adults and invite them into ministry in their parish.

- 4) To recognize a priest, deacon, or a parish staff member serve as a liaison with the young adult leadership at each parish to discuss ways the parish can support the young adults coordinate ministry and strategize outreach.

Parish leadership must recognize the presence of the young adults in the church. Having a parish staff member, a priest, or a deacon in frequent communication with the young adult parishioners can help strategize outreach, organize events, and find other capacities for young adults to serve the parish. This individual could be an existing contact with whom the young adult leadership is already communicating, or it could be a position that is developed under the advice of the pastor. In addition to Objective 2.3, this liaison serves as a mentor to the young adult leader(s) that helps them serve their young adult community and parish to the best of their ability.

## **Goal 4: Community**

To nurture communities of peers where young adults challenge each other to grow in holiness and friendship.

*“For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” (Matthew 18:20)*

So many young adults are searching for a feeling of belonging. Even in a digital age where everyone is constantly "connected" online, so many young adults still feel lonely or isolated. In addition, much of young adulthood is marked by its milestones and major life transitions: completing a degree, starting a new job, discerning a permanent vocation, or even moving to a new town or a new state. And while it is normal that this phase in life is transitory, young adults are often hesitant to “take root” and build relationships. This ministry is an opportunity to guide young adults into personal relationships with a community of peers. But ultimately, these friendships are a way to invite young adults into a deeper relationship with Christ.

### **Desired Outcomes:**

- 1) To have 30 young adult groups across the Diocese by the year 2025 that are based in a parish and meet the needs of the young adults in the community.

There are currently 15 young adult groups in South Carolina. With many young adults moving, starting new jobs, or starting families, many of the groups suffer from a high turnover rate. This effect was only magnified by the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic, with many young adults relocating and many groups dissolving navigating the complications from social distancing. Many groups will form but quickly dissolve without sustainable leadership or support. But with appropriate attention to active young Catholic communities and the assistance of the priests, we could have 30 established, parish-based groups with young Catholics who are registered and active at a parish with engaging and invested peer leadership.

- 2) To work with the Office of Family Life to develop or share formation materials for young married couples and young parents such as Bible Study guides and small groups during retreats.

The young adults in the Diocese have a variety of life experiences that influence their spiritual life. Ministry to young married adults is ideally connected to the young adult ministry that is typically perceived as only to single Catholics; young Catholics need to see their peers striving for holiness while actively pursuing their vocation of marriage. However, there is still potential for some parishes to form small groups specifically for

young married couples. As a Diocese, providing opportunities and resources for these communities to flourish could be as simple as sharing online talks from other married Catholic couples, sharing Bible Study discussion guides, or facilitating a small group of only married couples during retreats can provide a lasting impact on their spiritual journey.

3) To open a position for a paid, full-time Upstate Regional Coordinator (in conjunction with Campus Ministry or Hispanic Ministry) to help support the Young Adult Ministry leadership and provide training, guidance, or other additional resources.

An additional staff member in the Office of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry would meet both the immediate and long-term need of the ministry. Building relationships with young adults across the state, meeting with and forming the leadership, and supporting ongoing ministry efforts and events takes time and effort that is best cultivated with a team of multiple people.

## **Goal 5: Diversity Outreach**

To encourage intentional outreach to young adults from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds.

*“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:27-28)*

We strive to have ministries that are representative of the diversity of the holy, Catholic Church. And even though many of the young adults have seen the results of division and hostility that is now so prevalent in the world, we desire to form a ministry that celebrates diversity and inclusion of all of God’s sons and daughters.

### **Desired Outcomes:**

1) To have priests, young adult leadership, and members of the parishes intentionally invite young adults from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds into the young adult ministry.

A personal invitation is the first step to outreach, and as the leaders to the young adult outreach, our young adult leaders can encourage their priest, other parishioners, and members of the young adult group to be mindful of extending the invitation to our brothers and sisters of color.

2) To celebrate the lives of and encourage devotion to saints of African, Native American, Latino, or Asian descent within our parish and Diocesan Young Adult Ministries, particularly on feast days and during observances such as Hispanic Heritage Month and Black Catholic History Month.

3) To include the works of contemporary Catholic speakers, writers, and musicians that reflect the ethnic diversity of the Catholic Church in our parish and Diocesan Young Adult Ministries.

Including diversity and inclusion in Leadership Training provides opportunities for the young adults to learn more about the lives of the saints and contemporary Catholic leaders from other ethnic backgrounds. Sharing holy cards, books, talks, and other resources both in person and online (including Diocese of Charleston Young Adult Facebook and Instagram) invites the young Church to learn more about the variety of spiritualities in the Catholic faith and embrace the diversity of the Body of Christ.

## **Goal 6: Pastoral Care**

To provide resources in pastoral care that best supports young adults and addresses the challenges that are unique to their generation.

*“But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body...so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.”*  
(1 Corinthians 20, 25-26)

Bringing compassionate pastoral care to ministry is essential to the overall wellbeing of the young adults in the community. We strive to have a ministry that responds to the needs of young adults and provides a community of love and support. While much of parish pastoral care has been directed to aging persons or the physically ill, young adults have their share of physical, emotional, and spiritual needs that must be recognized by their community of faith.

### **Desired Outcomes:**

- 1) To provide a list of contacts and other resources to the young adult leaders that includes Catholic counselors, psychiatrists, and therapists in the Diocese of Charleston as well as other crisis hotlines under the guidance of Catholic Charities and the Office of Family Life.

We pray for the safety and well-being of all of our young adults; however, many young adults are encountering times of stress and transition that are detrimental to their mental health. And with ministry often in intimate settings such as small groups or retreats, young adults are open to share their struggles, even if some of their thoughts and emotions can be alarming, upsetting, or overwhelming to others. We praise God that this suffering has this opportunity for healing, but our leaders must be prepared to invite their young adults to consult a mental health professional and entrust the situation to the Lord when these situations arise. Well prepared leaders can be agents that connects their community to opportunities for emergency and long-term care.

- 2) To train young adult leaders on interpersonal communication during crisis situations.

While contact information of mental health professionals is now a necessity for our leaders, it is also important to give the leaders practical skills for when crisis situations arise, including, but certainly not limited to: depression, suicidal thoughts, sudden death of a group member, or unplanned pregnancy. Practicing interpersonal communication skills

recognize the signs of someone who is in distress, respond compassionately, and then direct the conversation to professional help if necessary. A compassionate vocabulary, nonverbal cues, personal boundaries, and follow-up conversations are all key components for healing, fostering positive connections, and building healthy relationships.

3) To provide additional information to the young adult leaders about support groups in South Carolina

Support groups provide an avenue for young adults to find encouragement and accountability in a variety of circumstances. While young adult ministry can supply meaningful emotional and spiritual support, support groups provide guidance and solidarity while facing challenges that other young adults may not understand. In addition, several of the established support groups in South Carolina do not acknowledge the spiritual life or embody the call of Christian discipleship. And working with Catholic Charities and the Office of Family Life, the Office of Young Adult Ministry aims to compile a list of various support groups that help young adults overcome personal obstacles and uphold the Christian lifestyle.

## Timeline

Upon review and approval of the Strategic Plan, the Office of Young Adult Ministry also includes a strategy of the presentation, implementation, and evaluation of the plan. The first year (2020) will focus primarily on presenting the Strategic Plan and sharing the vision with the Diocese, especially the pastors and young adult leaders who are the primary contacts with the young adults in South Carolina. Over the next couple of years (2021-2023, respectively) the Office of Young Adult Ministry will start implementing the desired outcomes outlined in the plan. Specifically, including new initiatives or events as line items in the budget proposals will take substantial planning and coordinating. And in 2024, the office will start collecting information about the effectiveness of the Strategic Plan through gathering input from young adults, priests, and the young adult leaders from across the Diocese. This input will be used to lay the foundation for the next Strategic Plan, to be developed in 2025.

## Conclusion

Thankful for the great support of the committee and the effort of the priests, religious, young adult leaders, and other ministers across the Diocese, the Office of Young Adult Ministry presents this Strategic Plan for 2020-2025. Great effort was taken by many to expand the vision of the ministry and to strategize evangelization to the young adults of the Diocese of Charleston. The Strategic Plan will still require great effort and continued prayer as we move towards implementation. But we are grateful for the support shown to the young adults of the Diocese and are hopeful for the future of the Church.

*“Where does Jesus send us? There are no borders, no limits; he sends us everywhere. The Gospel is for everyone, not just for some. It is not only for those who seem closer to us, more receptive, more welcoming. It is for everyone. Do not be afraid to go and bring Christ into every area of life, to the fringes of society, even to those who seem furthest away or indifferent. The Lord seeks all; he wants everyone to know the warmth of his mercy and his love”.*

-Pope Francis

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