NZCatholic

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Youth Leaders Gather for Synodal Conversations

Youth leaders from across the Diocese gathered for the annual Auckland Catholic Youth Leaders Hui in early October.

The hui focused on the future of youth leader formation, inviting participants to reflect on two questions:

1. *For new youth leaders, what formation and support is needed as they begin ministry?*
2. *For experienced youth leaders, what formation and leadership development is needed?*

Youth leaders reflected on these questions using the method of spiritual conversation. Developed by St Ignatius of Loyola and made popular through the Synod on Synodality, spiritual conversation is a method of discernment that seeks to listen to God through prayerfully listening to each other.

Introducing the process, Sam Brebner, head of pastoral services, encouraged participants to move beyond personal agendas and focus instead on what they sensed God was saying.

Youth leaders gathered in small groups and participated in three rounds of conversation, with periods of silence between each round. The process began with each person sharing without interruption, followed by reflection on what had resonated, before moving into a final round of communal discernment about where the Holy Spirit appeared to be leading the group.



The conversations produced several key themes, including: the importance of greater collaboration between parish youth ministries; the value of mentoring relationships; the need for spiritual as well as practical formation; and the benefit of shared resources to support common ministry needs.

Each group reported back to the wider gathering, contributing to a collective discernment about the future of youth ministry leadership formation within the Diocese.

A report summarising the feedback will be shared with youth leaders in the coming weeks. We are grateful to all those who participated, sharing their prayerful reflections to help shape the future of youth ministry in the Diocese of Auckland.



Education Leader Shares Varied Experiences in Podcast

Catholic schools offer young people hope – a commodity that is increasingly needed in a secular society – and are among the most important places of evangelisation, National Centre for Religious Studies director Colin Macleod has said.

Speaking on the *Catholic Kiwi Podcast*, Dr Macleod reflected on a faith journey that began in a vibrant Catholic family in Carterton, continued through service in the Air Force and seminary formation, and eventually led to a career in Catholic education.

Although he discerned that ordained ministry was not his vocation, he believes the call to priesthood continues through the baptismal vocation of all Catholics.

Teaching became the avenue through which he lived that calling, spending more than two decades in Catholic schools, including as director of religious studies at what is now Trinity Catholic College in Dunedin.

A recurring theme throughout the conversation with host Joanna Kearney was the importance of connecting faith to real life. Drawing on his family's experience after his wife suffered a life-changing stroke shortly after the birth of their son, Dr Macleod said young people need authentic faith rather than simplistic answers about suffering.

In one of the darkest periods of his life, he recalled sensing God's presence in the simple assurance: "I'm here."

"Now I wanted much more than that," he recalls. "I wanted, 'I'm gonna fix it', 'I'm gonna make Jan completely healed' and everything, but all I got was, 'I'm here'.

"And what more do we need?"

Today, Dr Macleod supports the implementation of *Tō Tātou Whakapono: Our Faith*, the New Zealand Catholic bishops' religious education curriculum.

He said the curriculum is designed to meet students wherever they are on their faith journey – from those with strong Catholic backgrounds to those with little or no religious knowledge.

He argues that Catholic schools play a crucial role in helping young people understand faith, meaning and human flourishing. Rather than simply teaching doctrine, they provide frameworks for understanding concepts such as brokenness, healing, hope and relationships with God and others.

Drawing on his doctorate research that explored parish-school relationships, Dr Macleod said Catholic communities thrive when they share a clear sense of mission and create genuinely welcoming environments.

He believes schools and parishes must work together to help people encounter Christ and grow in faith.

Find the podcast by searching "Catholic Kiwi Podcast" on YouTube or Spotify.

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Mass Attendance Grew 8 per cent in 2025

The number of Mass attendees in New Zealand grew by more than 8 per cent between 2024 and 2025, according to data collected by the country's six Catholic dioceses.

Christchurch Diocese saw the greatest increase in that period, with the Mass count rising from 10,711 to 12,594 – an increase of 17.6 per cent.

Auckland Diocese, which has about 48 per cent of the country's practising Catholics, saw an 8 per cent increase, while Dunedin Diocese saw 11.9 per cent more people in the pews regularly.

The dioceses of Palmerston North (7.6 per cent) and Hamilton (6.9 per cent) also saw significant jumps, while the Archdiocese of Wellington's Mass count remained steady.

Bishop Michael Gielen of Christchurch said he has seen two significant factors driving the large increase in Mass attendance in his diocese, which covers all of Canterbury and Westland.

"As the population of the greater Christchurch area continues to increase, we see the number of Catholics, including from some countries and regions with strong Catholic roots, growing quickly," he said.

"But we're also mindful of the increasing number of people who have chosen to become Catholic, including as adults, across our diocese and around much of the western world. Many people are also returning to the Church of their childhood. That is a source of much joy."

Auckland Bishop Steve Lowe, who is also president of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference, said the statistics present a tangible measure of the sense many Catholics are feeling.

"This emergence of an interest in faith generally, and in Catholicism specifically, runs counter to the narrative of a dwindling Church," he said.

"Statistical variances can often be attributed to a number of factors. That said, these numbers seem to suggest that the ancient message of the Gospel, presented through the lens of our contemporary Catholic thought, is resonating with people."

Data from recent years suggests it took until 2023 for Mass counts to return to pre-COVID levels (adjusted for population growth). In the two years since, Mass counts grew from 80,618 in 2023 to 90,462 last year – an increase of 12.2 per cent.



"Many people are also returning to the Church of their childhood. That is a source of much joy."

Catholic Enquiry Centre Asks Parishes for Initiation Data

The Catholic Enquiry Centre is taking steps to gather a clearer picture of those being initiated into the Catholic Church throughout New Zealand.

Parishes were recently asked to report the number of catechumens and candidates in recent years, including their age groups, so that trends can be identified and a better understanding gained as to who is coming into the Church.

This information is also contributing to a wider international picture being gathered by the Dicastery for Evangelisation.

CEC director Carly Mulqueen said "we're working alongside parishes and others across the Church to better understand what is happening, to equip people to accompany those who are searching and to help ensure there is a welcoming pathway when someone takes that first step".

"Every day at the Catholic Enquiry Centre we hear from people across New Zealand who are asking life's biggest questions," Mrs Mulqueen said.

"Some are searching for purpose. Others are returning to the faith they left years ago. Some have never stepped inside a Catholic church before but are curious about Jesus, prayer or what Catholics actually believe.

"One thing has become increasingly clear: God is moving. By the end of June, we had received more than double the enquiries of the first half of last year."

The CEC has noted that, across many nations, particularly among Generation Z, people are approaching Christianity with fresh curiosity and fewer preconceptions.

It was noted that behind every enquiry is a person – someone searching, questioning, perhaps sensing for the first time that God is drawing them closer.

"By the end of June, we had received more than double the enquiries of the first half of last year."

Catholic Enquiry Centre
Tūhuratanga Katorika
catholicdiscovery.nz

A Ministry of Presence: Our Hospital and Prison Chaplains

Hospital and prison chaplains play a pivotal role in the outreach of the Church. They provide compassion, hope and spiritual support to people during some of life's most difficult moments. By offering a listening ear, prayer and encouragement, they present reminders that God's love is present even in suffering, loneliness, and uncertainty.

Jesus said, "I was sick and you visited me… I was in prison and you came to me" (Matthew 25:36). Our hospital and prison chaplains live out this calling by "comfort[ing] those who are in any affliction" (2 Corinthians 1:4) and sharing hope found in Christ. We have a wonderful chaplaincy team in the Auckland Diocese.

In recent months there have been changes in this team. At a Pompallier Centre gathering in early September, Mass was celebrated and two new prison chaplains, Stephen Middleton (Paremoremo Maximum Security Prison) and Deacon Mannix Lopaz (Wiri Men's Prison), were commissioned by Bishop Steve. John Metherall who has worked coordinating the chaplains was thanked, acknowledged and blessed as he leaves the role.

The diocesan team were joined by members of the wider Prison Chaplaincy group for this special time of prayer and gratitude which was followed by fellowship over breakfast.



Fr Andrew Pham MF blessing Pat Cotton

October saw the stepping down of Patricia (Pat) Cotton from her current role as chaplain to Auckland City and Middlemore hospitals. This is the conclusion of 26 years of service as a chaplain starting at National Women's Hospital and including time at Starship. This ministry of presence and listening was acknowledged at a Sunday Auckland Hospital Mass where Pat was thanked and blessed as she moves into a new season of life.



Bishop Steve commissions Stephen Middleton and Deacon Mannix Lopaz as prison chaplains within the Auckland Diocese