

Youth Retreats in Ireland

*Guiding Principles for Good
Practice*



IRISH CATHOLIC
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

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FOREWORD

These guidelines have evolved under the auspices of the Catechetics Commission over a considerable period of time. The document has taken shape in consultation with a wide community of groups and individuals.

There has been widespread interest in the emerging guidelines, in light of the importance of safeguarding and promoting the spiritual and personal well-being of young people and those who work with them.

The guidelines are presented in their present form as a working document. They encourage everyone involved in the ministry of youth retreats to reflect on their practice and to strive for excellence in this important work.

The document refers primarily to day-retreats organised under the auspices of bodies such as schools, parishes and dioceses. The managers/management boards of these bodies are referred to as 'sponsors'.

The document has been reviewed by personnel at the National Office for Safeguarding Children.

The Commission acknowledges the contribution of all who have participated in this process. It is particularly grateful for the work of Fr. Declan O'Loughlin sm, chair of IAPPDA (Irish Association of Post Primary Diocesan Advisors), and Jennifer Perkins fma and Richard Hendrick ofm. Cap. Of Shekinah Training Course in youth retreat facilitation (All Hallows Pastoral Department)

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1. Introduction

The ministry of youth retreat work is an important aspect of youth ministry as it is envisaged in *Called Together. Making a Difference*, the framework document of youth ministry in Ireland today¹

Youth retreats take place in a variety of settings, including schools, parishes, diocesan youth ministry projects, pastoral and retreat centres. Youth retreats are designed and delivered in a variety of styles to meet the needs of many different groups. In all cases, there are basic principles which need to be observed, roles and responsibilities which need to be agreed and standards of good practice which need to be safeguarded.

Partners in the process of organising and delivering youth retreats include:

- ◊ Sponsors (managers/management boards engaging retreat facilitators/teams)
- ◊ Staff (those who work on behalf of the sponsor - e.g. school principals, RE teachers, chaplains, parish personnel, diocesan directors of youth ministry),
- ◊ Retreat facilitators/teams and
- ◊ Retreat Participants



It is our intention, in this document, to indicate guiding principles for youth retreats, to examine the roles and responsibilities of all partners in the ministry of youth retreats and to highlight key elements of good practice.

¹ See *Called Together, Making the Difference*, a framework for youth ministry in Ireland today. Published by the Episcopal Commission for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development and the National Committee of Diocesan Youth directors in May 2009, Dublin: Veritas.

2. Context of youth retreats in Ireland today²

Youth ministry does not take place in a vacuum; context is important. Youth ministry must be viewed in the context of a life-stage, in the context of changing physical, emotional, inter-personal, spiritual and intellectual realities. Youth ministry must also be understood within a wider social and cultural context.

In recent decades there have been rapid and wide-ranging social, economic, cultural and religious changes in Ireland. At this very time, a further radical shift is taking place. Such transformations can be particularly challenging for young people.

Today, the faith community is called to present faith as something alive and active, giving both a sense of belonging and of mission to each individual. Though church attendance in Ireland has declined, many young people still believe in god, pray and are searching for a meaningful spiritual path. Many are very committed to inclusion and are opposed to any form of discrimination, be it based on grounds of race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, social status or religion. They often have a greater sense of environmental responsibility and social justice than their predecessors.

Surveys regularly state that most Irish people of all ages still retain a strong sense of idealism and of spiritual hunger; there remains a deep desire for authenticity and for spiritual experiences that touch our hearts. In this context the ministry of youth retreats is a most relevant, challenging and potentially rewarding work.

²See *Called Together, Making the Difference*, Section 1

3. Guiding Principles

1. Youth retreats should offer positive faith experiences for young people. They are occasions where young people may experience joy and a sense of celebration, and be invited to prayer, organised reflections, meditation and suitable liturgy.
2. Those involved in youth retreat work must have appropriate qualification. The team leader, at least, should have qualification, preferably a primary degree or equivalent, in theology, spirituality or religious education.
3. Retreat facilitators/team members should have training and/or accredited experience in the organisation and running of youth retreats. They should attend ongoing supervision, either personally or in a group.
4. A contract should be agreed between the sponsor and the retreat providers, clearly stating the purpose and boundaries of the retreat, what is appropriate and what is not acceptable as part of the experience.
5. Retreats should be carefully planned and an outline of the programme submitted to appropriate staff prior to commencement.
6. Care should be exercised in liaising with staff (school principals, chaplains, RE teachers, parish team members, diocesan youth workers) prior to, on the day in question and in follow-up review of the retreat.
7. Youth retreats are not occasions for individual counselling or inappropriate personal sharing. Care should be exercised that young people who may require individual counselling or the intervention of designated personnel for safeguarding children are brought in due course to the attention of relevant staff. (See also section 4, point 6.)

8. Retreats with peers are not occasions for young people to share what might make them vulnerable or render them subject to peer pressure or amusement. Respect for the individual person must always be paramount.
9. All persons attending the retreat including team members should sign in/out of the centre where the retreat takes place. Copies of this log should be retained by the sponsor and the retreat team.
10. A written account including evaluation of the experience should be preserved on behalf of the sponsor.



4. Safeguarding Children, principles and practice

1. Institutions and organisations who sponsor youth retreats must either have their Safeguarding Children Policy in place and accessible to the public, or must have signed up to *Safeguarding Children, Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland*.
2. Sponsors must ensure that all aspects of the youth retreats for which they are responsible are set up and carried out in accordance with *Safeguarding Children, Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church of Ireland*.
3. In Particular, retreat personnel must have been recruited and vetted in accordance with church and State guidelines (Garda and PSNI vetting and certification).
4. All young people under age 18 attending retreats must have written permission from parents and guardians. (This requirement may be satisfied where participation in a retreat has been specifically named in school policies to which parents sign at enrolment/beginning of school year.) A written consent from the participant is also recommended.
5. A code of conduct should be worked out and agreed by all involved at beginning of each retreat.
6. If disclosures that create concern occur during the retreat the team must follow the sponsor's guidelines and report to the sponsor's designated officer for safeguarding Children



5.1 Role and responsibilities of sponsors

To establish criteria by which staff will assess the suitability to their needs of available retreat facilitators/teams and retreat programmes. In this context, to establish criteria by which staff will assess the suitability of available retreat facilitators/teams and retreat programmes.

To ensure that all necessary protocols relating to good practice and to safeguarding children and young people are in place.

To ensure that necessary indemnities in relation to all aspects of the retreat are in place.

To ratify the contract by which a retreat facilitator/team and programme is agreed.

To request and review summary reports and evaluations of retreats delivered..



5.2 Role and responsibilities of staff

To implement the criteria and the procedures established by the sponsor. In particular, to:

- ◊ Retain responsibility for continuity of faith formation and of pastoral care of the young people for whom they are planning the retreat;
- ◊ Evaluate the needs of the young people concerned;
- ◊ Negotiate with suitable facilitators/teams;
- ◊ Check credentials of the facilitator/teams are familiar with and committed to sponsor's guidelines in relation to safeguarding children, disclosure of abuse, or other critical incident;
- ◊ Check that retreat facilitators/teams are committed to supervision and to their accountability structure;
- ◊ Agree a contract between the organisation and the retreat facilitator/team and present it to the sponsor;
- ◊ Provide lists of names and relevant information re participants (e.g. health and safety concerns, recent events) to the retreat facilitator/team, having due regard for confidentiality;
- ◊ Ensure the availability of first aid;
- ◊ Assume appropriate responsibilities during the retreat time, as indicated in good practice section 6 below;
- ◊ Receive the report and evaluation of the retreat from the facilitator/team;
- ◊ Carry out an evaluation to supplement that presented by the retreat team;
- ◊ Present a summary report, together with evaluations, to the sponsor.

5.3 Role and responsibilities of retreat facilitators/teams

To be committed to the ministry of youth retreats, as welcoming the work of God in the lives of retreat participants, in keeping with guiding principle 1, above.

To present an authentic account of themselves and their retreat programme to staff, in accordance with guiding principles 2, 3 and 4.

To be familiar with the contract agreed with the sponsor and to deliver the retreat programme accordingly.

To familiarise participants at the start of each day, in an age-appropriate way, with the purpose and boundaries of the retreat.

To be faithful to the structures and processes of the retreat in accordance with guiding principles 5 – 9 inclusive.

To observe good practice in all matters relating to the retreat, as indicated in section 6 below.

To carry out an evaluation of the retreat (including participant feedback), and to relay the outcome to the staff.

To submit to vetting in accordance with Safeguarding Children, principles and practice 3.

To engage in ongoing personal, spiritual and professional development.

5.4 Role and Responsibilities of Retreat Participants

To come prepared to engage in the retreat programme.

To treat the retreat facilitator/team, the staff and co-participants with due respect.

To act at all times in ways that will ensure their own safety and that of others.

To cooperate with the retreat facilitator/team in the course of the retreat programme.

To honour the rights of their peers to participate in the retreat.

To contribute to the evaluation processes.



6. Additional Elements of Good Practice

Good Practice: Sponsors and Staff

It is important that:

- ◊ A list of the participants and relevant information is provided to retreat facilitator/team;
- ◊ That a record of attendance is maintained for future reference (at least one year);
- ◊ Any person(s) present during the retreat day is introduced to the participants and their role explained;
- ◊ Relevant staff are reachable at all times, and committed to supervise at agreed break times.



Good Practice: Retreat Teams

It is important that:

- ◊ A Team leader is appointed;
- ◊ The team prays before each retreat;
- ◊ The team prepares together;
- ◊ All materials to be used during the retreat: music, images, film etc. Are checked beforehand, and be age and gender appropriate;
- ◊ No dangerous games are included in the programme;
- ◊ A clear statement of confidentiality is made at the start of each day;
- ◊ Absolute confidentiality, clearly explained, is not guaranteed;
- ◊ Punctuality is observed – including time to become familiar with all aspects of the venue, e.g. fire and safety procedures;
- ◊ Guidelines to be followed in case of a critical incident are in place and understood;
- ◊ Personal and team evaluation, including feedback from participants, is carried out.

Good Practice: facilitators/team members

It is important that a retreat facilitator and each member of a retreat team:

- ◊ Prepares conscientiously (including remote and immediate preparation, and personal prayer);
- ◊ Uses a youth-centred approach;
- ◊ Engages only in appropriate sharing at all times;
- ◊ Avoids closed personal questions;
- ◊ Applies an appropriate dress code;
- ◊ Is accountable for all aspects of the work, within the structures of team, association etc;
- ◊ Avails of supervision either personally or in group;
- ◊ Has spiritual direction;
- ◊ Engages in personal and professional development

