“Tom White” is named Australian Film of the Year by the Catholic Film Office for 2004.

Young People and the Future

Young People and the Future
Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference

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Foreword

This Report is the outcome of three years of privileged dialogue between the Catholic bishops of Australia, young people and Catholic parishes. It is intended for the whole Catholic community and all Australians. As the focus has been on young people, the Introduction contains an Open Letter addressed exclusively to them by the bishops, in response to respectful listening to their concerns.

The Report is action-oriented. From the outset, the bishops made it clear that their Consultation on Young People and the Future was intended to lead to committed action. The action suggestions listed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 came initially - and strongly - from young people of school age as well as young adults. They were offered for consideration to the bishops who have adopted them.

The basis of the Report is the Catholic Church's social justice teaching. The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference entrusted the administration of the Consultation to the Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development and Peace (BCJDP) as a social justice project. All participants in the Consultation were urged to keep in mind the need to apply that teaching to the situation of young people.

I thank the members of the BCJDP Secretariat and the many others who helped them bring the project to this stage. In a special way, I thank the many people, especially the young, who contributed to a very fruitful dialogue. May the Report's actions in the mission of the Church and the Australian community be equally fruitful.

(Most Rev.) Kevin M. Manning
Bishop of Parramatta
Convenor, Organising Group for the Bishops’ Consultation on Young People and the Future
Young People and the Future

Introduction
Vision Statement

The Church in Australia believes in the dignity of all young people, and seeks to find new and better ways to express this.

Young people have energy, enthusiasm, honesty, commitment, and a deep conviction that things can be different.

Young people have a unique and invaluable role to play in the life of our country and Christian community.

The Church seeks to help young people to find a sense of meaning and purpose in life; and to enter a future in which they will feel loved; when they will belong and participate fully; when all of them will know justice. This will be the time when they will know the true and unconditional love of Jesus Christ.

Young people are called by the Church community to use their talents to bring about change. This is a call addressed to all, and all are challenged to act together.
Open Letter from the Catholic bishops to the young people of Australia
Dear Young People of Australia,
Over the past three years we, the Catholic bishops of Australia, have been asking you what is happening in your lives, and what you would like to change. We listen to you because you are created and loved by God who says all life is precious. He wants you to be able to live your life to the full. You are not simply products of human genetics, but human beings of dignity and worth who have an eternal destiny. You have much to offer our world.
We have heard many moving and inspiring stories, which, on the one hand, gave us a feeling of emptiness and, on the other, a feeling of hope. We can see there are many things in our world that need to be changed, to make it a more just and fairer world, for which Jesus asked us to strive.
We acknowledge and deeply regret that the Christian community has not always lived up to challenges in the way Jesus wants. You have sometimes felt let down and unwelcome in the very community you should be able to look to for a sense of belonging, love, respect, guidance and support. We recognise that the Catholic Church needs to be an example for you. We believe that you, as young people, have an irreplaceable and unique part to play in the life of the Church and in the wider community. We value you and want you to value others.
It is not enough to thank you for talking to us about your hopes and dreams. The next few years take us into a new century. Within the Church a tradition called Jubilee invites all believers to repair past damage and to take actions aimed at making the world the kind of place Jesus wants. The Jubilee of the year 2000 will be a time to remember and celebrate Jesus’ life - a life devoted to reconciling the world with his Father. This celebration is one we look forward to as an opportunity to bring about reconciliation. In the Consultation, you were asked what we bishops, the Church, governments, the wider community and you yourselves could do to change situations of injustice. You have given us many answers.
We need to examine those answers together. As bishops called to leadership, we will try to ensure that those suggestions, if practicable, are carried out. You, in turn, must help us to implement them.
Acting on what we have heard, we will continue to work towards a just society in which young people are given the opportunities to participate more fully. We have endorsed many of the actions requested by you and the broader community. We take your message seriously, but indicate that some suggestions are beyond our control to implement. In addition, lack of resources and of a clear consensus within the Church or among yourselves mean that we have not accepted all points of view. We ask you to take up with us the challenges, and to participate in the actions to which we as a Church are committing ourselves.
You have had an important role in this Consultation and will have in commitments to follow. Your determination to create a better world will ensure new life in the community and especially in the Church. We challenge you, as leaders now, to act for justice, to support your peers, and to be a voice for those who are struggling and are on the fringes of society.
Thank you for giving us the opportunity to listen to you, and to see the strengths that you as young people have to offer. We invite you to work with us to bring about the just and fair world of which we have spoken.

Cardinal Edward Clancy,
President Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
In Christ,
"It’s not just not having a shelter but having no one you can call your own... One young person had no one he could ring up or talk to." (A bishop from a country diocese)

"There’s a great spirituality in young people; it may not come across in the traditional forms.... but there’s a deeper spirituality that aches for justice and fairness and young people can see more clearly perhaps the racism and the various other things in our society that are not quite right." (A bishop form a large city)

"It’s a matter of trying to convince young people that they can make a difference by their own actions, organizations and interventions." (Another bishop)

"We live with the questions, the awkward questions, the unanswered questions." (Another bishop)

Young People and the Future: Chapter One
Consultation and the world of young people

"Young people feel the need to be accepted, respected, trusted, needed and given freedom to walk their own journey - jet they experience being stereotyped, Judged and not valued." (Young Person, Parramatta)

Recognising this basic need of young people, the Australian Catholic Bishops launched in 1995 a social justice Consultation titled Young People and the Future. They were conscious of the leadership of Jesus in his love for the poor, the powerless and the young, and the way he invited them to come from the margins of society to the very heart of the community. Acknowledging that young people are faced with many challenges, the Consultation aimed to listen to young people, and in response, to support them in positive action. This Report is a record of stories, experiences, recommendations and commitments to action.

Stage One: Listening to Young People

The Consultation was in three stages. Stage One, in 1995, involved listening to thousands of young people through discussions, questionnaires, open forums, and examining Australian society through sharing young people’s experiences. Included were indigenous communities, young people from non-English speaking backgrounds, young people from the Australian Defence Force, young people at risk, schools, parish groups, and Catholic movements. They shared their fears about the future and their dreams. As a young man from Perth said:

"My dream is to have a family, a career, and to be able to put back into society".

It was a community consultation, not a statistical survey. Although aimed at all young Australians, it tended to be pursued through church youth networks. Thus many, though not all, responses to the Consultation have come from young people and adults connected with the Church. A reference group of young adults from around Australia scrutinised the responses, some of which were published in the report, Lean On Me. It reflected back to the community a range of issues linked with the four emergent themes established by young people in this order: Relationships, Identity, Unemployment and Church.

Stage Two: Decision-Making for Change

Stage Two, in 1996, was a reflection on the issues raised in the light of the Gospel and the Church’s social justice teachings. A concentrated group of issues for action emerged and are listed above. The concerns especially important to young people were: unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, identity and self-esteem, Church, relationships, racism, violence and safety, suicide, and specific moral issues. The Church was affirmed for promoting "a feeling of community and love" (young person, Rockhampton), and challenged by many more who struggled to give witness to these values. Young and older people suggested actions by which the Church, government
and community groups might remedy identified evils and concerns, some making
cardinal commitments to personal and group renewal.
Stage Three: Committing to Action
In early 1997, there was further participation by many young people from every State
and Territory. Senior youth from Catholic schools and young adults in focus groups
from dioceses, movements, and disadvantaged youth, identified unemployment as
the primary concern, (cf.graph)
"I really want a secure job so that I can get on with my life" (non-English speaking
background young person), and "I fear not getting a job" (young person, Brisbane),
were common responses.
Other young people told how unemployment affects other areas of life: "Housing,
education, health and unemployment are all related." (Young indigenous person, La
Perouse)

Young people shared their experiences of boredom and drug and alcohol abuse.
This was a second key issue.

"Drugs can be an expression of anger, a way to lose yourself for a while, to escape
reality." (Young person in care, Melbourne) Issues about identity and a search for
meaning were a third major concern: "We need an identity!" (teenager, Perth) was a
simple and eloquent plea. Indigenous young Australians explained that "Kids should
be educated to be proud of their heritage because many are not proud of their
heritage and proud of who they are, not proud of being Aborigines, losing their
identity/" Some issues, which were incorporated into this third theme for action, were:
relationships, suicide, violence and safely. It became clear that these issues do not
work in isolation, but combine to affect young people's lives in detrimental ways:
action was called for on several fronts.
Some have questioned why Church, as a key concern, is not a focus in the rest of
the Report. The reason is that respondents in Stage 3 placed it low on their issues7
list and offered few actions that answered the criteria mentioned below. It is critical to
note that there are many actions affecting the Church in its identify, structures,
mission and relationship with society in the three focus issues for action, especially in
Identify and the Search for Meaning. The Consultation was always intended as an
exploration of one aspect of the social mission of the Church to society - the
possibilities and problems of young people in the public arena. It was never
envisaged that it look at the internal issue of young people and their involvement in
the Church solely, or at church youth ministries in general.

"Kids should be educated to be proud of their heritage because many are not proud
of their heritage and proud of who they are, not proud of being Aborigines, losing
their identity." (Indigenous young Australian) Therefore, it is on these three issues -
Unemployment, Drug and Alcohol Abuse, and Identity and the Search for Meaning -
that this Report has focused for national action.
This is not to discount the importance of many other concerns mentioned by young
people, but it is an acknowledgment that different groups and regions face unique
problems, which must be addressed with unique strategies and actions.

In mid- and late-1997 respondents, including youth workers, diocesan coordinators,
Catholic youth organisations and especially a large number of young people, were
asked to be more critical in identifying actions for issues highlighted in 1996. They
were asked to offer very specific, relevant, achievable and time-focused action
suggestions on any issues for the church community, governments and the general
community. A Vision Action Team (VAT) involving young adults from several States
was formed by the Secretariat of the Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development and Peace (BCJDP) to collate the action suggestions and to advise the bishops on issues and future pastoral plans. The team consulted people in research, policy, planning and pastoral work and fine-tuned the suggestions. Appendix B lists contributors and groups who have been involved in the Consultation. Hence, the experience and knowledge of many people were mobilised to serve young people.

The Vision Action Team remained scrupulously faithful to the essence of action suggestions that fulfilled the following criteria:

• Initiatives to effect positive change for young people, and based on Catholic social justice teaching;
• Highly specific actions which could be achieved in the long or short term;
• Purposeful actions which addressed the causes, and not only the symptoms or effects of social injustice;
• Realistic yet challenging actions for each group of agents.

The actions and commitments in the following sections give great emphasis to education, advocacy and resourcing. Education is essential to allow people to be agents of change; advocacy is important especially at the national, state or diocesan level because young people, individuals or grassroots groupings often have little power to effect change; and financial and human resourcing needs attention because new programs and initiatives demand it.

"Housing, education, health and unemployment are all related." (Young indigenous person, La Perouse)

Where to from here?

The remainder of this Report is devoted to the chosen issues and action suggestions. Each of the three issues is illustrated with stories and quotations, put in context and explored in the light of specific examples given by young people, and reflected upon with the aid of Catholic social justice teaching. The action suggestions are for the serious consideration of all groups and individuals involved in church, government and the wider community.

Some actions suggest services and programs, which are already provided. Young people are calling for action to improve promotion of and access to those services, of which many are unfamiliar. The People First! Conference, sponsored by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in 1996, released a "Plan of Action" including recommendations about valuing young people. These are similar to several actions in this Report and deserve attention. In 1997, the research project on the church in higher education also published a report, Taking Stock. It, too, refers to services - for young tertiary students.

Although this Report marks the end of the organised stages of the Consultation, much remains to be done. In the lead-up to the Great Jubilee in the year 2000, a time of preparation and renewal, the Church renews its commitment to young people. Local church communities, diocesan bodies and levels of government are asked by the bishops to take up the challenge. The Educational Resource issued with this Report offers suggestions and guidelines to aid planning and implementation. Individuals and groups in parishes and neighbourhoods are invited to educate and commit themselves, to develop communication and to share resources. All groups are strongly encouraged to consult again, to allow maximum participation of young people in decision-making, and to set strategies for action, all under a clear vision for young people. This is critical, locally and regionally. It is the beginning of a time of action; a time for the Christian community, the nation, for young and older peoples to work together.

All are challenged to commit themselves to act, to work towards greater social justice for young people, and towards making their hopes and dreams a common reality in which all Australians can share.

Young People and the Future Chapter Two
Unemployment:  
The Gospel call to justice and action

"Georgina is 17 years old and has just left school. She is looking for work, but is finding it very difficult as employers either want someone under 18 or over 25. Georgina goes to the CES every morning. She looks at the job lists and takes copies of everything that she is eligible for. She spends the day sorting out her applications. Georgina has been doing this for four months and is starting to think that it is a waste of time. Work is an essential rite of passage between adolescence and adulthood. It was a rite of passage Jesus shared, learning a carpenter's trade and "growing in wisdom and in years" (Luke 2:52) He was a person of struggle and achievement, who worked for the coming of the Kingdom. Pope John Paul II says work is a fundamental dimension of our existence and human dignity, and is the key to the whole "social question."

Australia has a crisis of youth unemployment. All age groups are affected by unemployment, but young people are affected disproportionately. An overwhelming majority of young people told the Consultation that unemployment is their greatest concern. They also hold little hope of employment prospects improving. More than 25 per cent of young people aged between 15-24 are unemployed2, while a high percentage remain in education not because they are interested in furthering their education, but simply because there are no jobs for them.

"Unemployment seems to be the greatest social problem we young people experience today. Something needs to be done to assure youth of permanent employment." (Young person, Geraldton)

Because work is connected to self-identity, everyone who is capable of and willing to join in the paid workforce has a right to do so. Through work, paid or unpaid, a person achieves fulfilment as a human being and, in a sense, becomes "more a human being." All have the right to participation in the development of the socio-economic, political and cultural life of the community. Unemployment diminishes those possibilities.

Pope John Paul II is particularly conscious of the pain of young people, who "after appropriate cultural, technical and professional preparation fail to find work, and see their sincere wish to work and their readiness to take on their own responsibility for the economic and social development of the community sadly frustrated."

You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions. In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord, Jesus, for he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive. Acts 20: 34-35. The unacceptably high levels of youth unemployment render even young people who have work more vulnerable. The prevalence of casual, unskilled work adds to insecurity for young people in the labour market. Where there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of other young people ready to fill the position, one is less likely to resist erosion of wages and conditions. This can result in exploitation. Underemployment and the lack of sufficient work are aspects of youth unemployment which are often forgotten. Unemployment is much more complex than simply not having a job, and is a problem not confined to those currently unemployed.

The Governor General, Sir William Deane, has rightly said that "youth unemployment must be seen and addressed as an overwhelming social problem which is already having permanent destructive consequences with respect to the self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem of a significant proportion of a whole generation of younger Australians...The plain fact is that it is our society which has failed them."

One of the greatest obstacles to the elimination of unemployment is the nature of current policies. They are driven by so-called economic rationalist imperatives, which stress the unfettered dynamic of market forces. This theory holds that a base level of
unemployment is necessary and desirable for a 'healthy' economy. Unemployment exerts a consistent downward pressure on wage rates and inflation - primary objectives of current economic policy throughout the Western world. The principles on which these policies rest must be exposed and vigorously opposed. Sociological analysis recognises that economic rationalism is incompatible with social justice. Inequalities are inherent in the market economy and cannot be eliminated without some State intervention. "A society...in which economic policies do not allow workers to reach satisfactory levels of employment cannot be justified from an ethical point of view, nor can that society attain social peace"6 As a prominent political economist says: "There is something quite pitiful about an economy - and something quite appalling about a society - which relies on each month's unemployment rates remaining high (or even going higher than the last) in the hope that this might bring some meagre reduction in the rate of interest. Things need not be this way"7

The struggle for us is that we want to be able to make decisions about who we are and what sort of life we want to lead;... Do we want to work? What sort of work? Do we want a family? In the absence of regular work you can't make decisions about buying a house or having a family or any of those sort of things like that." (University student, Melbourne) Those who argue that the State has no place in the economic life of the nation are misguided. The State has a responsibility to ensure that the economy is used as a tool to enhance the well being and dignity of all its citizens. Economic policies that have been practised by governments over the last decade must change, because unemployment, while always an evil, can become a social disaster. 8 While it is critical to acknowledge the impact of globalisation on governments' capacities to direct national economies, a key principle must remain - the economy should be at the service of the people, and not the other way around. 

Jesus tells a parable of two houses, one built on sand, the other on rock. (cf. Matthew 7:24-27) The image can be applied to social systems. An economic system driven by short term financial and political goals is built on sand and will eventually fall, while an economy built on the rock, which is the dignity and value of each person, and exists to serve the weakest and the smallest, will endure. Key principles of Catholic social teaching - the 'common good' and 'the preferential option for the poor' - give witness to the fact that the economy and its operation are never ends in themselves; they are a means to greater social good.

The Australian community must be careful not to blame the victims of unemployment. Society, including the Church, needs to respond sensitively; on the one hand, recognising the great importance of work to identity and self-esteem; on the other hand not perpetuating a work ethic which equates a lack of employment with a lack of any worth, or of any valuable contribution to society. Schools have a crucial role in preparing young people for entry into a world that may not provide them with a job. Schools should scrutinise their philosophies and practices to ensure that they do not over-emphasise their role in preparing young people for the labour market. They are communities that aim at enabling young people to grow to their full human potential. Pope John Paul II says that "beyond the rights which one acquires by one's own work, there exist rights which do not correspond to any work performed, but which flow from one's essential d as a person."10

I always hear people saying that young people are lazy... But no one is out there encouraging them and saying, "You can do it, I'll support you."(Young person, Albury) The Australian Catholic Bishops see youth unemployment as a grave concern requiring immediate action. They call on all sections of the Australian community to play their part in combating this crisis. They especially encourage young people to exercise leadership, and use their talents, as those responsible for their own lives. For their part, the Australian Catholic Bishops will support them in:
1. Speaking out clearly and working against the "economic rationalist theory" where it impacts adversely on people. The bishops will encourage church, other agencies and people of good will to work together to implement these actions.

2. Lobbying government on policies, which work against the creation of jobs.

3. Encouraging local Catholic communities to inform themselves and their general communities more on work and youth employment issues.

In their dioceses, bishops will encourage, by consultation, planning and decision, the establishment of policies and programs. They strongly encourage action at the following levels:

Diocese
4. Diocesan agencies continue to educate people on the social obligation to provide work for all; maintain a strong voice in the local community on employment needs; take responsibility for educating the Church and wider community about the meaning and value of work.

5. Just and equitable policies and practices be followed in church employment structures.

6. Directors of Catholic Education Offices, Congregational leaders and directors of health care institutions, while aware of inadequate funding and increasing costs, continue to work against factors that limit the accessibility of all Catholics to their services.

Church Groups
7. Parishes to explore the possibilities of involvement in labour market programs for young disadvantaged job-seekers and to inform themselves about the work of local agencies, for example, Centacare and the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

State Government
8. To provide adequate travel and health concessions, rent and other assistance for jobseekers.

Federal Government
9. To initiate genuine job creation schemes, including those aiding infrastructure development, and promote alternative models for employment, for example, worker co-operatives.

10. As a joint initiative with State governments, adequate funding be provided and so reduce fee levels for all accredited training, which gives young people recognisable skills transportable nationally across a range of occupations and industries.

11. To continue to examine upfront fees in public tertiary institutions that disadvantage poorer young people seeking to prepare themselves for employment.

12. To maintain travel, and other concessions and medical bulk-billing services for young jobseekers.

13. To provide funds for low interest loans for job creation schemes, for example, incentives for young jobseekers to start Information Technology businesses from home.

14. To introduce or increase substantial taxes on luxury imported goods, not covered by GATT, which are also produced in Australia, to encourage employment in industry; and maintain the slowing down of tariff reduction in key industries.

15. To explore restoring the powers of the Industrial Relations Commission, which could arbitrate on the 38-40 hour week and higher overtime payment rates, so that more work is available for jobseekers.

16. To consider a small levy on international financial transactions to raise substantial revenue for job creation or public spending.

17. To investigate a means to increase local investment, for example, pooled superannuation development funds.

18. To reduce or remove tax deducibility on foreign and external loans to stimulate more local investment.
19. To introduce tax incentives for companies developing labour-intensive industries in areas of high unemployment.

For Discussion
(a) Is getting one's "first job" an important stage of life for young people? Have you experienced this?
(b) "One of the greatest obstacles to the elimination of unemployment is the nature of current economic policies".
   o What is "economic rationalism"?
   o How does "downsizing", casual work, globalisation etc. hinder young Australians from getting permanent, full-time work?
   o Can governments and other economic managers aim for the goal of full employment with our present policies?
(c) Respond to the four quotations and the story from young people in Chapter 2 above. Do they seem realistic experiences from what you know of your community?
(d) How relevant and achievable are the 'action suggestions' listed above?

5. Sir William Deane, address opening the Apex Clubs of Australia National Convention, Cairns, 10 July 1997, pp.2-3.

Young People and the Future  Chapter Three
Drug and alcohol abuse: The Gospel call to justice and action

"David was 16 when his friends introduced him to heroin. He started using just socially'. David then became addicted to heroin and found it hard to financially support his habit. This meant that he felt he had to deal in drugs to make enough money. This affected his relationship with his family who sometimes tried to help him, and other times just got angry and refused to speak to him. David tried three times with the help of his family to get off heroin, but kept going back to it. David's family talked to him about how his faith could help him to get off heroin and how what he was doing was hurting not only himself, but hurting others. With the help of his family, friends, and community agencies, David has now been off heroin for four months and says that he will never go back because he knows that he has the help of God and those people around him."Drug and alcohol abuse is a phenomenon, which the community largely associates with youth and young adults. In just a few decades, the use of illicit drugs has dramatically increased from being relatively limited to widespread among young Australians. In this Consultation, young people have specified the use and abuse of drugs and alcohol as major issues facing their generation. These concerns are not limited to drug and alcohol abuse among young people themselves. They are also very concerned about the effects on them of drug and alcohol abuse by others, particularly family members. Even though many seem
to be aware of the devastating effects of drug and alcohol abuse, the knowledge does not always prevent some from choosing this path.

"I suppose drugs are a symbol of hope for young people today, yeah, they help." (Young person in hostel accommodation, Parramatta)

Drug and alcohol abuse is much more than a health and public policy crisis. Rather, it is a symptom of deep social and psychological problems that cannot be simply addressed by legislation. The Pontifical Council for the Family has said: "The use of drugs is symptomatic of a profound 'malaise'... Drugs in fact do not enter into a person's life like a bolt of lightning out of the blue, but like a seedling that takes root in a well-prepared soil. Behind these phenomena is the individual's cry for help as he is left alone with his life; there is a desire to be not only recognised and appreciated, but also to be loved." It is in receiving and expressing this love that young people can come to know Jesus, the bread come down from heaven, who alone can satisfy the hunger which is a daily reality for these young people, (cf. John 6:41) While recognising that drug and alcohol abuse are long-standing, interrelated and seemingly intractable problems, factors which appear to contribute to drug and alcohol abuse should be examined.

"This is an important issue to us as many our age fall into this trap. We see them destroy themselves and we want to stop and help them." (Young person, Kempsey)

The connection of young people with their families and communities is central to understanding drug and alcohol abuse. Substance abuse needs to be understood in the broader context of risk-taking behaviour. Where young people do not feel valued, loved or connected to family or society, they are more likely to engage in such behaviour. A landmark study in 1997 involving 12,000 high school students in the United States, the largest conducted with adolescents, found that teenagers with strong positive emotional attachments to their parents or their teachers were less likely to engage in high-risk activities, including the use of drugs and alcohol. Emotional bonds were reported to be easily the most important factor in determining the behaviour of young people.

Many professionals also point to links between drug and alcohol abuse and unemployment. Unemployed young people are susceptible primarily because of their deep feeling of worthlessness to society. Boredom and the availability of 'empty' time add to these feelings. Nor does the perpetuation of negative stereotypes of young people help the battle against drug and alcohol abuse. The media bears a particular responsibility here. The effects of drug and alcohol abuse are far-reaching. They have horrendous consequences for a young person that can last a lifetime. At times they result in death, not just directly through overdoses, but also indirectly, through car accidents, disease, and other injuries. The destructive outcomes of drug and alcohol abuse not only take a heavy toll on the victims, but also on their family members and society in general.

The Australian community has reached a crucial point in its battle against drug and alcohol abuse. There seems to be an increasing progression from less harmful experimentation to chronic abuse and dependence. The role of organised crime in the spread and distribution of drugs is becoming entrenched. Despite more than 25 major inquiries in the past 25 years, the levels of drug and alcohol abuse have not reduced significantly. Australia is currently grappling with the prospect of heroin trials and the decriminalisation of marijuana. Like the rest of the world, it is still struggling to respond to drug and alcohol abuse in meaningful and effective ways. The principal challenge is the need to deal with both the causes and symptoms of drug and alcohol abuse in ways, which restore and maintain the dignity of each human being, and a person's ability to participate fully in the human community.

For many young people modern life seems empty, providing little meaning and hope for the future. The Church cries out against the circumstances which lead young people to drug and alcohol abuse. "The behaviour of these young people often reveals the manifestation of a painful helplessness due to a lack of trust and
expectation with regard to social structures to which they no longer feel they belong. Who can be blamed if many young people have no desire to grow up and become adults? Have these young people been given sufficient reason to hope in tomorrow, to invest in the present so as to gain in the future, to be stable, feeling solidly grounded in a past which they feel belongs to them?"14

In the face of the circumstances which lead young people to drug and alcohol abuse, the Church turns to the hope given to all by Jesus, who came to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners, and sight for the blind, (cf. Luke 4:18) The liberating love of Jesus Christ, which is beyond all knowledge (cf. Ephesians 3:19), will be fully experienced by young people only when it is made manifest in a just society, one from which they need to seek no escape. Mindful of their responsibilities as leaders of the Church in Australia, and trusting in the promise of Jesus Christ who calls all people to freedom, the bishops call on the Church, governments and community to take immediate action in response to the widespread abuse of drugs and alcohol. The Australian Catholic Bishops will endeavour to:

1. Raise with the appropriate State and Federal government authorities the issues associated with drug and alcohol abuse listed in this Report.
2. Release through an appropriate agency an occasional paper on the issue of drug dependence and its relationship to Christian values.
3. Encourage Catholic Education Offices in dioceses to:
   o Explore the best practices in drug and alcohol education, for example, courses integrating moral values within Personal Development and Health and Physical Education programs from early primary schooling;
   o Develop and improve programs on drug and alcohol education, consulting young people in their construction;
   o Involve parents and health officers at each stage;
   o Arrange professional development for teachers responsible for the revised curricula, and all other teachers who are expected to recognise the signs of dependence.

In their dioceses, the bishops will encourage:

Church Groups
4. Agencies to distribute directories of family and health services for young people to parishes, schools and the wider community, seeking the co-operation of community agencies in accomplishing this; for example, the Alcohol and Other Drugs Council of Australia, the Centre for Education and Information on Drugs and Alcohol (New South Wales).
5. Their people, especially young people, to raise awareness of and promote discussion about drugs and related issues. This could be done in conjunction with the UN International Day Against Drug Abuse on 26 June each year.
6. Young people, with other Churches, local service providers and councils, to explore the possibilities of jointly sponsoring drug/alcohol-free dance parties and functions.

State Government
7. To increase funding for research into:
   • The differing needs and habits of young men and women, who use alcohol and drugs, linked to entertainment, sport, boredom, regional variations, family or cultural role-modelling etc.
   • The causes, effects, and possible methods of lessening the problem of drug and alcohol abuse; and take action on the result of this research.
8. To explore strategies to reduce intoxication of young people, for example, by improving food and entertainment standards in licensed premises; and improve measures to ensure compliance with legislation on liquor licensing and control.
9. To set aside and use an adequate percentage of its revenue from alcohol licence or franchise fees to develop and expand advertising campaigns on the effects of drug and alcohol abuse and dependence and other prevention programs.

10. To provide a significant increase in funds for the rehabilitation of people dependent on drugs or alcohol.

Federal Government

11. To fund expanded rehabilitation programs for young people and extend anti-drug and alcohol campaigns, as well as offer tax incentives to businesses which sponsor such schemes.

For Discussion

(a) David was just 16 years old when he started using heroin 'socially' and became addicted. Are drug and alcohol abuse a "natural part of growing up" today?

(b) Are there deeper causes for drugs, alcohol and risk-taking behaviour, eg young people feeling disconnected from family and community, of being in greater need of love? Do you know of any personal examples?

(c) Can you see strong links between drug & alcohol abuse and issues like unemployment, poor self-esteem, and media stereotypes of young people?

(d) How could your local community act with young people to counter boredom, lack of meaning and hopelessness?


Young People and the Future Chapter Four

Identity and the Search for Meaning: The Gospel Call to justice and action

"James is 20 years old and has been unemployed for about three years, having done only short training programs or jobs in that time. He really wants to contribute his gifts and talents to society but through his schooling, some workplaces and being unemployed, as well as the way the media portrays young people, and government policies which do not respect young people, James feels he has been constantly rejected. James often comments that he sees a lot of hypocrisy in the groups in society such as Government and the Church. When he tries to do something he loves and wants to contribute he can't because he is not supported by wider society. He is quickly losing faith in trying to contribute, and is increasingly seeing himself as being unable to be of any use. He is no longer sure of what he really wants to do with his life. James also has a girlfriend who is going through the same thing. Young people in Australia face many different challenges: unemployment, drug abuse, violence, family breakdown, the threat of racism, the lure of self-harm behaviour solutions and relationship difficulties, to name only some. While all serious in themselves, and all requiring targeted and careful attention and action, they are all, in different ways, contributors to, or symptoms of, a malaise which is denying young people hope. That malaise, though difficult to isolate and describe precisely, can best be described as a crisis of identity and meaning.

Those involved in this Consultation have been both heartened and humbled by the insights young people have offered about the kind of society which others are
building with and for them. One thing is certain: young people crave meaning in their lives. Although often surrounded by emptiness, they have a deep hunger for meaning and for justice. Pope John Paul II writes: "It is not wrong to want to live better; what is wrong is a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed towards "having" rather than "being/ and which wants to have more not in order to be more but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself."15 Those who accuse young people of wanting only to have, rather than to be, are greatly underestimating them. Australian society has much to gain and to learn from its young people, if only it would listen more often.

"As a young Australian citizen, I know most of us teenagers today have so many dreams and so many questions which are unanswered. I wonder how many of us today have goals in our lives." (Secondary school student, Rockhampton)

Many young people talk of lacking purpose or meaning in life. They often lack helpful role models, feeling that the world in which they live bears little or no resemblance to that from which their parents emerged. They are also denied rites of passage, which can confirm them as adults with all the responsibilities and respect that brings. The principal rite of passage in a young person's life in the industrialised world has traditionally been the beginning of a secure and profitable working life. The working life they begin now, if they begin one at all, is fraught with uncertainty and sometimes indignity. They are under great pressure to experiment with sex and with drugs and alcohol, although the clear message of young people has been that these provide only transitory relief from the pain they are feeling. Most of all, many of them lack the fullness of life which comes from a deep and lasting awareness that they are made in the image of God, loved by God, and that they have a vital and irreplaceable part to play in God's constant creative endeavour.

The family is crucial in the development of a young person's sense of self. The transition to adulthood is by its very nature a time shadowed with doubt, uncertainty and even at times fear. It is also a time for taking risks. Unfortunately, many young people feel that they are facing these doubts and fears alone. Family life is being constantly undermined. Economic and other pressures on families often result in less contact between young persons, their parents and their extended family. As family bonds weaken, so, too, do community bonds. These realities combine to further disconnect young people and deny them a sense of belonging.

Young people in Australia are constantly barraged with negative images of themselves. A variety of sources comes together to form an amorphous and anonymous societal voice, from which young people hear that they do not care about anything or anyone other than themselves; that they lack discipline and respect; that they are unemployed because they are lazy and do not want to work. The listening undertaken as part of this Consultation has found none of the accusations to be true - quite the contrary in fact. The danger to young people is not themselves, but the culture in which people live today. This largely nihilistic culture, dominant with negativity and images of rancour, hedonism and rage, has submerged the virtues of faith, hope and love.

Suicide is perhaps the most frightening manifestation of the crisis of identity and meaning among young people. Australia has one of the highest rates of youth suicide in the world, with 25 in every 100,000 young men (aged 15 to 25) and 6 in every 100,000 young women taking their own life.16 The risk of suicide is even greater in country areas. Significant numbers also attempt suicide without succeeding. It is an issue which worries young people and about which they spoke during the Consultation. They see their friends, siblings, school mates and loved ones taking their own lives in ever growing numbers. They see its effect on families, on communities and on themselves. Suicide is a complex phenomenon, not open to simple explanations or responses. Addressing the hopelessness, which has overcome many young people, is an appropriate place to begin.
All people are called to the fullness of life. (cf. John 10:10) Jesus held a special place in his heart for the young: "Let the little children come to me." (Luke 18:16) In light of this, the followers of Jesus are called to a special concern for the young who are struggling with what it means to grow up in Australia in the 1990s. In this search for meaning lies a particular challenge for the Church and society as a whole. Against a current of negativity and hopelessness, all are called to find new and more meaningful ways to respond to the hunger for meaning and thirst for justice which grip the young people of this society - to make real for them the love of God, made tangible in the person of Jesus, a love which has no end. (cf. Romans 8:39)

“I would like to be able to hold my head up high and be proud of who I am.” (Young person, Parramatta)

The bishops call on the entire Australian community to work towards a society that will give young people meaning and hope. Young people themselves are called to exercise leadership wherever they can, and use their talents, as those responsible for their own lives. For their part, the Australian Catholic Bishops:

1. Invite members of the Vision Action Team and other committed young people to continue to work with members of the Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development and Peace (BCJDP) to monitor and evaluate the implementation of this Report until the BCJDP April/May meeting in 2000.

2. Support young people in all areas of church life, including leadership, especially at parish and diocesan governance levels; and that this be undertaken by careful facilitation and planning in dioceses.

3. Encourage each bishop in his diocese to enable deaneries or groups of parishes to provide inservice/professional development for priests and lay leaders, especially young people, to focus on issues and relationships with young people on at least one occasion each year, beginning in 1999.

The Bishops further encourage:

Diocese

4. Each bishop and the director of his Catholic Education Office to consult, with the aim of providing a full-time qualified counsellor (or the equivalent in training), who has appropriate understanding of Christian values, in every Catholic school of 500 students or more by the end of 2000; and that this policy be needs-based, reflecting varying regional requirements of students.

Church Groups

5. Each parish to access data about community services and alternative care programs for young people; that these resources be compiled in conjunction with local community agencies and diocesan youth ministries; that they be posted prominently in churches, schools, community centres and public areas.

6. Catholic secondary school principals to:
   o Provide and promote programs which help young people in relationships of crisis, grief and loss etc;
   o Publicise pastoral programs through Catholic and mainstream media;
   o Provide ongoing professional development for teachers and seminars for parents on the development of adolescence, including causes and warning signs of youth suicide.

7. Directors of Catholic Education Offices, secondary school principals, Catholic youth and welfare agencies liaise to ensure that transitional programs are available for school leavers to help them adjust to the world beyond schooling; for example, welfare and travel concessions, housing, employment, relationships, careers counselling, keeping in touch with friends, banking, budgeting, youth movements or groups, etc.

8. Parishes through pastoral councils, teams or priests to make a commitment in their mission statements to support youth programs in their overall pastoral planning; that this include resourcing such as finance and personnel.
9. Parish priests to invite members of the parish community to help in preparing homilies on topics such as personal identity, family living, relationships, and communication with young people.
10. Secondary school principals to initiate, continue or re-introduce retreats of several days for Catholic school students to develop further Gospel spirituality, self-esteem, emotional growth, healthy relationships and a deeper sense of Christian community.
11. Parishes through their leaders to advocate and work with local government and community service providers to offer more safe places for young people to meet and socialise, for example, by expanding council and community welfare and recreation centres.
12. Parishes through their leaders to advocate and work with local government in promoting the value and achievements of young people in their community through media campaigns, community events etc.

State Government
13. To increase resources to improve and make more child protection and counselling services accessible.
14. State Education Departments, to:
   o Examine and improve school counselling facilities, working towards the provision of one full-time qualified counsellor (or the equivalent in training) in every school of 500 students or more by the end of 2000; and that this policy be needs-based, reflecting varying regional requirements of students;
   o Ensure that transitional programs are available for school leavers, to help them adjust to the world beyond secondary schooling; for example, concessions, housing, employment, relationships, careers counselling, keeping in touch with friends, banking, budgeting, youth movements or groups, etc;
   o Provide ongoing professional development for teachers and seminars for parents on the development of adolescence including the causes and warning signs of youth suicide.

Federal Government
15. To exercise as an urgent priority, through watchdog bodies and media self-censorship, more control over harmful content of programs on television, films, the Internet, and in child and young adult media.
16. To encourage through tax or other incentives, corporations marketing principally to young people to fund quality media productions so as to provide positive images and role models for young people.

For Discussion
(a) Where do young people, and Australians in general, find meaning and hope today?
   o What is their "dream" for the future
   o What is your dream?
(b) What are the key dangers and problems for young Australians in our culture today?
(c) Look at the action suggestions above. How could your local community offer more support, challenges and leadership opportunities to young people?

15. Pope John Paul II, On the hundredth anniversary..., n.36.

Young People and the Future Chapter Five
Conclusion The Future

"What I am going to say to you is not as important as what you are going to say to me. You will not necessarily say it to me in words; you will say it to me by your presence, by your song, perhaps by your dancing, by your skits, and finally by your
enthusiasm. (Pope John Paul II) The Christian community has listened to young Australians express their joys and hopes, their grief and anguish. This Report offers belief in the dignity and hope of young people; it also offers challenge. It highlights the commitment of the Church and a call to action by all in this country to work together for renewal and greater justice for young people as the new millennium approaches.

The concerted effort will demand sacrifice. One young person who felt driven to fight and care for the poor was a determined woman called Mary MacKillop: in establishing the Sisters of St Joseph she did it the Australian way. Another was Frederic Ozanam, beatified recently, and founder of the Society of St Vincent de Paul. A university student, he, in the words of Pope John Paul II, "understood that charity must lead to efforts to remedy injustice - charity and justice go together". The Pope urges young people to be generous leaders in faith and in loving service of their brothers and sisters. "I invite...in particular young people to show courage and imagination in working to build a...society where the less fortunate will be esteemed in all their dignity and will have the means to live in respect". 17

This Consultation has been grounded in a common belief in that young person, Jesus Christ, who gave everything for others, especially the powerless. May it inspire this nation to renewal!


Appendix A

Terms of Reference
Bishops' Consultation on Young People and the Future (from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference 30 November 1994)

Rationale
Young people experience more acutely than others in the community the problems and possibilities of Australian society. Their search for an ethic for our times is a symbol of hope to us all. This is why the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference wishes to enter into dialogue with young people, to identify the major social justice issues affecting young people in Australia, and to work towards addressing these issues at various levels. The bishops invite the whole of the Church, and the wider community, to join in this project.

This action is inspired by Jesus, who had a special concern for the poor, the powerless and the young. It will be guided by the tradition of Catholic social teaching and action. In our own time, Pope John Paul II's way of being a listening presence among young people provides us with a model:

In the young there is, in fact, an immense potential for good and for creative possibility. Whenever I meet them in my travels throughout the world I wait first to hear what they want to tell me about themselves, about their society, about their Church. And I always point out: "What I am going to say to you is not as important as what you are going to say to me. You will not necessarily say it to me in words; you will say it to me by your presence, by your song, perhaps by your dancing, by your skits, and finally by your enthusiasm" (John Paul II, Crossing the Threshold of Hope, Jonathan Cape, London, 1994, pp 124-125)

Objectives
The Objectives of the project will be:
1. To enter into dialogue with young people and hear what they think about the problems and possibilities of Australian society, its future, and their own future.
2. Together with the whole community to identify and examine the major social justice issues (both Australian and international) that affect young people and that require action by young people, the Church, and others.
3. To select priority issues with young people and to teach and act on these issues together with the whole community drawing on the tradition of Catholic social teaching.

Approach
A spirit of consultation and dialogue will animate the project, which will draw upon the experience of the Bishops' inquiry into the distribution of wealth in Australia. The initial, listening phase will use a variety of methods to promote communication between the bishops and young people. Widespread community participation will be encouraged throughout the project.

Responsibility
The project will be overseen by the Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development and Peace on behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, and administered by the Secretariat of the Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development and Peace. It will be conducted over a period of approximately two years.