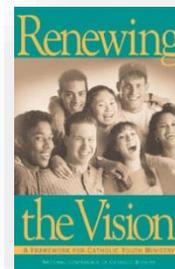


# Living the Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry: Celebrating *Renewing the Vision*

**Tom East, Director, Center for Ministry Development**

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*Renewing the Vision – A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* was approved and published in November 1997 by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops for the United States (now referred to as the USCCB). Since that time, this document has sold over 138,000 copies in print form in addition to hundreds of thousands of downloads. More importantly, the insights of this document have spread to parishes small and large throughout the United States and to most English-speaking nations around the world. Many people credit *Renewing the Vision* with strengthening and transforming Catholic Youth Ministry. This document provides a compelling vision for ministry with youth and for parish life that includes youth as full members of the community. It also provides a common language and framework for envisioning and building a ministry with youth that is responsive, inclusive and comprehensive.

It is striking how enduring *Renewing the Vision* has become. Many documents of the bishop's conference are received by the field with initial enthusiasm but receive little attention after the first few years of implementation. *Renewing the Vision* continues to be a driving force in leadership training, resource development and parish renewal of ministry. This document is also the focus of dialogue and debate, conversations that point toward the growing edges of the vision as well as areas of critique. As we recall the past 20 years, analyze our current context, and look ahead to future ministry opportunities, it seems appropriate to take the time to look again at the insights of this document, to see what we've learned and to chart a path for continued growth in our pastoral ministry with youth.

## YOUTH MINISTRY BEFORE *RENEWING THE VISION*

In 1976, the United States of America was celebrating its bicentennial year. In that same year, the Subcommittee on Education for the United States Catholic Conference published a document that attempted to name, envision, and inspire pastoral ministry with youth in the United States that would truly reflect all that we have learned about ministry, adolescents, leadership, and parish life. This document is entitled *A Vision of*

*Youth Ministry.* Prior to the publication of this document, Catholic ministry with youth was provided largely through the work of Catholic schools, who provided education and formation for youth, CYO – Catholic Youth Organization, which provided social, sports, and programs of evangelization for youth in parishes and dioceses, and CCD – Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, which provided religious education for children and youth who attended public schools. *A Vision of Youth Ministry* brought together hundreds of years of Catholic ministry with youth with the insights of the recent Second Vatican Council. Because of Vatican II, Catholics began to use the term “youth ministry” for the first time. Prior to the council, we saw that term as identified with the Protestant denominations who had been developing youth ministries since the 1880’s. *A Vision of Youth Ministry* did something special and important: it named a truly Catholic vision for ministry with youth that utilized all of the resources available in communities while retaining the importance of catechesis and the privileged place of sacraments for the life of Catholic young people and parish communities. For Catholic parishes, the message was very clear: we can develop ministry with youth that integrates that best techniques, strategies, and resources used by other churches, but we use these resources in ways that serve the unique mission of our Catholic faith.<sup>1</sup>

*A Vision of Youth Ministry* provided a definition for Catholic Youth Ministry, six principles, two goals, seven components, and a description of the context and dimensions of youth ministry. The dimensions include the often-quoted statement that “Youth Ministry is to, with, by and for youth.” (One way trainers would jokingly encourage leaders to remember this idea was to say that ‘youth ministry is *with a 2” by 4”*’.) This vision document also included a description of leadership that called for genuine collaboration on behalf of youth:

“Part of the vision of youth ministry is to present to youth the richness of the person of Christ, which perhaps exceeds the ability of one person to capture, but which might be effected by the collective ministry of the many persons who make up the Church.”

*A Vision of Youth Ministry*, USCCB, 1976, page 24

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<sup>1</sup> For a complete development of the history of Catholic youth ministry, see *Leadership for Catholic Youth Ministry: A Comprehensive Resource*, edited by Thomas East (New London CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2013), Chapter 2.

The guiding scriptural image for this document was the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), which highlighted the importance of relationships and the process of beginning our ministry with the questions of youth. In the years that followed the publication of *A Vision of Youth Ministry*, many dioceses developed programs of training for adult and youth leaders, and many parishes developed and transformed their ministry with youth to match this guiding vision more closely.

In the early 1990's, leaders began to recognize additional things that we were learning in our ministry with youth. New documents had been published that highlighted the importance of evangelization and the role of families. New resources were being developed to address the developmental needs of youth. New challenges were identified in ministering to youth in diverse context and among diverse cultures. There was also a concern that the scope of ministry described in *A Vision of Youth Ministry* was not being fully implemented in most parishes. Even parishes that embraced the language and vision for youth ministry often responded with a single youth group that was centered on the personality of the youth minister or a small group of leaders.

#### A NEW MOMENT – A NEW DOCUMENT

After much consultation with national and local youth ministry leaders, the Bishops of the United States published *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry*. This document is not a repudiation of the previous vision statement. Instead, it is intended to provide direction for the continued development of effective ministry with young people and to affirm the 1976 *A Vision of Youth Ministry* document. In *Renewing the Vision*, faith communities are challenged to address the current situation of youth. Communities are asked to invest in youth and to use current resources to reach all youth, including those who are most in need. Our vision is expanded by a focus upon calling youth to discipleship. This emphasis was very influenced by the words, work, and leadership of our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, and his messages of the World Youth Days which began in 1985, from which many quotations are included in the document. To truly call youth to relationship with Christ and form them as disciples would require that parishes would make youth ministry a central concern.

As with the previous document, *Renewing the Vision* does not provide specific programs or structures. Instead, it provides a practical framework in which parishes can utilize the resources of their community and integrate youth fully into the life of the community.

To highlight the continuity between the documents, *Renewing the Vision* uses the definition from *A Vision of Youth Ministry* as a guiding theme.

“Youth Ministry is the response of the Christian community to the needs of young people and the sharing of the unique gifts of youth with the larger community.”

*A Vision of Youth Ministry*, page 6 / *Renewing the Vision*, page 1

Besides this definition, which offers a pattern of responding to youth and including their gifts, *Renewing the Vision* provides these other dimensions of a framework:

- Three goals that keep the vision focused.
- Seven themes that provide important criteria for effective ministry.
- Eight components that highlight specific areas of ministry in the Church that should be included in ministry with youth.

## WHAT WAS NEW AND WHAT’S IMPORTANT?

One of the challenges of ministry is that there are so many good things we can do, we can often be overwhelmed. How do we discern the most important things? *Renewing the Vision* works diligently to suggest that there are priority areas needing our attention in youth ministry.

Among these, the insertion of the first goal for youth ministry suggests an essential direction for our shared work as youth. Through this first goal, youth become participants in the building of the kingdom.

“To empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today.”

*Renewing the Vision*, page 9

The inclusion of this goal was the source of controversy during the consultation phase of RTV. Many experts believed that youth were not yet capable of discipleship, which is more suitable to young adults and adults. Others disagreed, and pointed to the many scriptural and contemporary examples of adolescent disciples.

Ultimately, the bishops themselves affirmed the importance of youth being formed as disciples and voted to move this goal to the first position. This was one of over 200 amendments that were suggested when the bishops met, discussed, and voted upon this document at their annual meeting. In the end, 63 of the amendments were included

in the document which was passed overwhelmingly by the full body of bishops. This is an important note because *Renewing the Vision* is a document of the full conference of bishops for the United States. This process shows that the bishops got their hands into this document and that *Renewing the Vision* truly reflects our national vision for youth ministry. In contrast, *A Vision of Youth Ministry* was a document of a subcommittee of the bishops' conference that had only two bishops present.

Another important element of *Renewing the Vision* is the call to comprehensive youth ministry. Sometimes when people hear the term "comprehensive," they associate it with "overwhelming" because it implies that the ministry will have multiple dimensions. But comprehensive doesn't mean that the ministry looks like a circus or that it will overwhelm parish resources. It means that the ministry should attend to the eight components. That ministry responds to the youth in the community in all their diversity. Youth come to ministry from diverse cultures, diverse economic situations, and diverse levels of faith involvement and with diverse interests. To be comprehensive also requires that there are a variety of leaders. Comprehensive youth ministry recognizes that ministry that happens in a variety of settings. Youth experience ministry when gathered together and when ministry is provided for them in individualized ways. Family is our first community and is a privileged setting for youth ministry. Parish is an essential setting for youth ministry as home to the sacraments, community, and opportunities for mission. The wider community is a setting for ministry with numerous opportunities and includes our connections with the universal and local church as well as connections to the civic community.

More importantly, comprehensive youth ministry avoids time proven pitfalls for pastoral ministry with youth. When ministry is comprehensive, we avoid personality-driven ministry where the ministry is centered on the particular gifts and interests of one or a few charismatic leaders. It also avoids the "one size fits all" youth group or any other ministry that is organized around just one dimension such as a ministry that is only social, or only educational. A comprehensive approach to ministry keeps us from putting all our youth ministry expectations into one program such as our sacramental preparation program for Confirmation.

There are some important aspects developed in *Renewing the Vision* that reinforce these essential dimensions:

- The role of parishes is developed as a central context for youth ministry and leaders are encouraged to create "Youth-Friendly Parish" communities.

- Parishes are directed to attend to the diverse cultures within their community and to help youth develop the skills and attitudes needed to eradicate racism and to embrace the many gifts and insights of youth from the many cultures that comprise our church.
- The role of family is described as vital in the faith formation of youth. Youth ministry views parents as partners in ministry and encourage faith sharing, prayer, and service with families of youth.
- Leaders are called to collaborate in the wider community on behalf of youth, paying special attention to the development of “assets” that youth need as they will transition to adulthood.

In one of the Sherlock Holmes mystery novels, the great detective solved a murder mystery because of the “dogs that did not bark.” He knew that the murderer was known to the dogs because they were not harmed, but they did not bark when the intruder entered the house in search of his victim. Researchers often use this term to identify the importance of what is left out in a research setting or, in this case, in a document. For *Renewing the Vision*, there are at least two important things that are not mentioned or are mentioned only in passing:

- **Youth Group** – this term cannot be found in a search of *Renewing the Vision*. In the practice of youth ministry, youth groups or communities are often an important and very valid dimension of a parish ministry. The problem occurs when the parish confuses the youth group, which is just one group of young people, with the whole of youth ministry, which describes all the pastoral efforts directed towards youth. This omission is a telling direction and warning not to over-rely on one group model to hold all our hopes for youth ministry.
- **Diocese** – the word “diocese” is included just five times and nearly every time, it is a list that includes “parish.” I believe that this is important. When *A Vision of Youth Ministry* was first promulgated, many dioceses responded by developing a diocesan youth ministry program. Many of these programs felt like a diocesan youth group and competed with local parish efforts. The omission of specific direction for diocesan ministry implies an emphasis for dioceses in supporting the development of parish ministries. Many dioceses consider the impact on parishes as they discern service priorities: we will pursue this initiative if this service supports parishes in their development of youth ministry; if this initiative merely competes with parishes for the attention of their young people, we will not do it.

## IMPACT OF RENEWING THE VISION

In 1998 when *Renewing the Vision* became widely available, it quickly started a transformation of Catholic youth ministry. Hundreds of diocesan and parish leaders attended a series of conferences held coast to coast that were designed to help understand and implement this new document, which quickly became a bestseller for the bishops' conference and has remained one of the top 20 selling documents in each year since its publication.

The publications office for the USCCB attributes the success of *Renewing the Vision* to two factors. First, the national youth ministry community actively continues to support and use the document in training and resources. Secondly, the document continues to have life because it is included and foundationally aligned with the *National Directory for Catechesis*, the *National Competency Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministry*, and numerous other documents.

*Renewing the Vision* also continues to inspire conversations and continued growth in youth ministry in the United States and in many other countries. Beginning with its publication in 1997, *Renewing the Vision* has impacted ministry with youth throughout the world, especially in English-speaking nations. Many countries, including Canada, utilize the framework of *Renewing the Vision* and provide local contextualization. Other countries have created their own vision documents using many elements from *Renewing the Vision*. (See *Appendix 1: Global Youth Ministry Vision Documents and Training*.)

*Renewing the Vision* also instigated numerous research projects that explore youth ministry and its dimensions. The study that is most closely related to the document is the *Effective Practices for Dynamic Youth Ministry* project which was published in 2004. This study intentionally sought to uncover the models and key factors that parishes experience in implementing the insights of *RTV* effectively. Ninety-six parishes and over 400 youth and adults were involved in the qualitative research which also included a national symposium of youth ministry leaders. A key finding in this research was the importance of the parish inclusion of youth as valued members of the community. Several models were identified along with high impact program areas and essential elements for parishes in the practice of youth ministry. Much of this research was affirmed by the 2008 study of *Exemplary Youth Ministry*, also referred to as the Spirit of Youth Ministry project. This important study focused on 475 congregations from seven denominations, including Roman Catholic, and identified faith assets in the lives of youth and assets of congregations that help develop vibrant faith in adolescents. This year, the *Study of Engaged Catholic Youth* affirmed many of the recommended

practices and directions of *Renewing Vision* as it identified factors that were of greatest influence for youth who participated in the 2011 National Catholic Youth Conference. (See *Appendix 2: Research in Youth Ministry*.)

## WHERE DO WE GROW FROM HERE?

As we celebrate, acknowledge, and reflect upon fifteen years since the publication of *Renewing the Vision*, leaders of youth ministry from parishes, organizations, schools, and universities should see this moment as an opportunity to name a common framework, language, and direction as we embrace new possibilities in our ministry with youth and their families. *Renewing the Vision* is a living document that continues to develop as leaders implement pastoral ministry with youth. As leaders, we continue to write this document through our leadership actions, our innovations, and our continued discernment of the movement of the Spirit. We work together within the Church to help youth encounter Christ and proclaim his love to the world.

“Make Christ, the Son of God, the centre of your life. But let me also remind you that following Jesus in faith means walking at his side in the communion of the Church. We cannot follow Jesus on our own. Anyone who would be tempted to do so ‘on his own,’ or to approach the life of faith with that kind of individualism so prevalent today, will risk never truly encountering Jesus, or will end up following a counterfeit Jesus.”

Pope Benedict XVI, Homily during the 26<sup>th</sup> World Youth Day,  
Madrid, Spain, August 15, 2011

“What do I expect as a consequence of the Youth Day? I expect a mess. There will be one. There will be a mess here in Rio? There will be! But I want a mess in the dioceses! I want people to go out! I want the Church to go out to the street! I want us to defend ourselves against everything that is worldliness, that is installation, that is comfortableness, that is clericalism, that is being shut-in on ourselves. The parishes, the schools, the institutions, exist to go out!”

Pope Francis, Address to Argentinian Youth in preparation for the 27<sup>th</sup> World Youth Day,  
Rio de Janeiro, July 26, 2013

“So I ask you: Are you looking for empty thrills in life, or do you want to feel a power that can give you a lasting sense of life and fulfillment? Empty thrills or the power of grace? To find fulfillment, to gain new strength, there is a way. It is not a thing or an object, but a person, and he is alive. His name is Jesus Christ.”

“...the only response possible for a disciple of Jesus is the gift of self, even of one’s own life, in imitation of Christ. It is the attitude of service.”

Pope Francis: Welcome Ceremony for World Youth Day – Krakow, July 28, 2016.

## APPENDIX 1

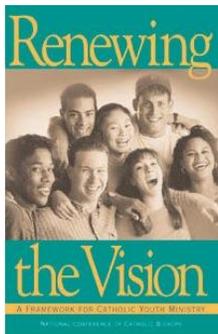
# GLOBAL YOUTH MINISTRY VISION DOCUMENTS

The framework of goals, components, and themes for comprehensive youth ministry have been integrated into several vision statements in English-speaking nations who have each added important elements to the global conversation about youth ministry.

## UNITED STATES

### *Renewing the Vision – A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry*

Published November 1997 by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

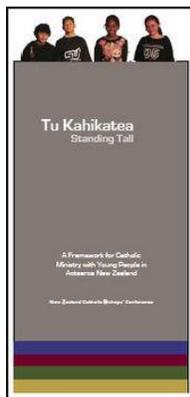


#### *Scriptural Image*

This document provides the scriptural image of the sending forth of the disciples, two by two, (Luke 9:1-3,6) reminding us of the urgency of empowering disciples.

#### *Contribution*

The document emphasizes the empowerment of youth as disciples, promotes the integration of youth within the parish community and presents a vision of shared leadership. (<http://www.usccb.org/about/laity-marriage-family-life-and-youth/young-adults/renewing-the-vision.cfm>)



## NEW ZEALAND

### *Tu Kahikatea – Standing Tall*

Published August 2006 by the New Zealand Catholic Bishops’ Conference

#### *Scriptural Image*

This document provides the scriptural image of the Woman at the Well, (John 4:4-42) reminding us of the hunger of youth to be evangelized and to witness to Christ’s love.

#### *Contribution*

The document incorporates the Mauri language and cultural concepts throughout the document which also describes with eloquent simplicity the call for ministry to be both bilingual and multicultural.

[www.catholic.org.nz/ms/dsp-default.cfm?loadref=117&pid=B4BEBA31-A4AD-7432-401B10E81CBB2770](http://www.catholic.org.nz/ms/dsp-default.cfm?loadref=117&pid=B4BEBA31-A4AD-7432-401B10E81CBB2770)

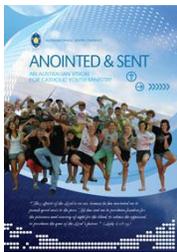
## IRELAND

### *Called Together. Making the Difference. A Framework Document for Youth Ministry in Ireland*

Published in May 2009 by the National Committee of Diocesan Youth Directors (NCDYD) and the Commission for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference

#### *Scriptural Image*

This document describes God's love as "prodigal", referring to the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). It connects this scriptural idea with the ancient Christian symbol of the Pelican who like Christ, feeds its young with its own blood.



#### *Contribution*

*Called Together* suggests the element of Pilgrimage as an important way to bring together the elements of ministry with youth. As adults and youth journey together to a holy place or shrine there are challenges and opportunities for spiritual growth. This document also incorporates reference to the safety of youth and integrates recent documents committing to safe environments in ministry.

[http://www.catholicbishops.ie/wp-content/uploads/images/stories/features/Youth\\_framework\\_doc/youth\\_framework\\_synopsis.pdf](http://www.catholicbishops.ie/wp-content/uploads/images/stories/features/Youth_framework_doc/youth_framework_synopsis.pdf)

## AUSTRALIA

### *Anointed and Sent - An Australian Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry*

Published in July 2009 by the Australian Bishops' Commission on Pastoral Life

#### *Scriptural Image*

*Anointed and Sent* utilizes Jesus' proclamation from the scroll in the temple as its scriptural focus (Luk3 14:18-19). This image reminds us of our call to become Good News to young people in imitation of Christ.

#### *Contribution*

In its introduction to the eight focus areas, this document includes an important description of the interplay between these areas which we refer to as components of youth ministry in *Renewing the Vision*.

<http://www.youthministry.catholic.org.au/>

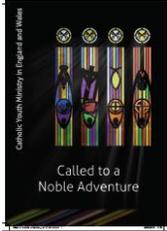


## ENGLAND AND WALES

*Called to a Noble Adventure – Catholic Youth Ministry in England and Wales*

Published in March 2012 by the Catholic Youth Ministry Federation (CYMFed)

### *Scriptural Image*



Numerous scriptural images are used including the description of Jesus traveling with the disciples throughout the land “proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God” (Luke 8:1-3). This image reminds of the urgency of bringing God’s Good News to youth.

### *Contribution*

*Called to a Noble Adventure* separates the first goal of *Renewing the Vision* into two separate goals which focus on the formation of disciples and the sending of youth to be witnesses.

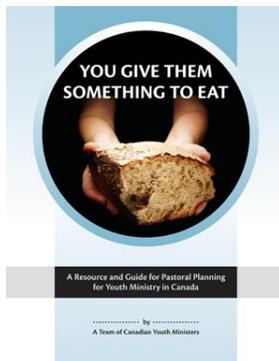
[http://cymfed.org/\(X\(1\)A\(NBjARobAzQEkAAAAAYTlhOTQyZWU+ZWU5YS00ZDk1LTlkYjAtMjdIMTIhNGFiODk3egeAZzJgZuAR2iye0nhiK3MkzSQ1\)S\(xqwd1o45bww3i5551u4f1545\)\)/blog/ViewPost.aspx?ID=26](http://cymfed.org/(X(1)A(NBjARobAzQEkAAAAAYTlhOTQyZWU+ZWU5YS00ZDk1LTlkYjAtMjdIMTIhNGFiODk3egeAZzJgZuAR2iye0nhiK3MkzSQ1)S(xqwd1o45bww3i5551u4f1545))/blog/ViewPost.aspx?ID=26)

## CANADA

Published in June 2016 by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

### *Scriptural Image*

This document uses the story of the loaves and the fishes (Luke 9:12-17) which challenges faith communities to identify resources for ministry with young people.



### *Contribution*

*You Give Them Something to Eat* presents school or university and social media / technology as additional settings for youth ministry and provides contemporary vision for reaching today’s youth through technology. The document also includes Intentional Relationship Building as an element.

<https://secure.cccb.ca/pubs/pdf/184-920.pdf>

## Training in Youth Ministry

Another way that the insights of *Renewing the Vision* have contributed to the international conversation and practice of youth ministry is through training for youth ministry leaders.

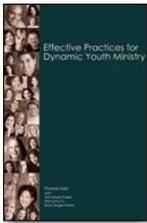


The Certificate in Youth Ministry Studies began in 1979 as a program of the Center for Ministry Development, as a method for preparing leaders to implement *A Vision of Youth Ministry*, which was published in 1976. By 1997, this program had already been introduced in Canada, Ireland, and the Caribbean Islands. After the publication of *Renewing the Vision*, partnerships were formed with religious communities to create local programs for ministry training utilizing *RTV* as a core document. The Irish Certificate in Youth Ministry Studies was created in 2002, in partnership with the Redemptorist community. In 2008, the Redemptorist community of Canada assumed leadership for the Canadian Youth Ministry Certificate Programme. 2010 saw the development of the Scottish Youth Ministry Certificate Programme, created in partnership with the Xaverian fathers and the Global Education Centre. In 2011, the Viatorian community began its work in partnership with CMD to develop the Belizean Certificate Program in Youth Ministry Studies. The program has also been sponsored by the Archdiocese of Agana, Guam for three cycles. In 2016, the Center for Ministry Development launched a blended learning model combining gathered and online elements. CMD also assumed leadership for the Canadian Youth Ministry Certificate Programme.

## RESEARCH IN YOUTH MINISTRY

A variety of research projects have been conducted in Catholic youth ministry since the publication of *Renewing the Vision*. The following is a sampling of some of the significant projects.

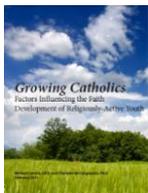
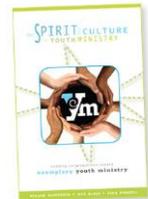
*The Emergence of Lay Ecclesial Youth Ministry as a Profession within the Roman Catholic Church* is a research project conducted by Dr. Charlotte McCorquodale of Ministry Training Source and is based upon surveys conducted at the 2000 National Conference for Catholic Youth Ministry. (<http://www.ministrytrainingsource.org/MTSresources/researchpapers.htm>)



*Effective Practices for Dynamic Youth Ministry* by Thomas East, Ann Marie Eckert, Dennis Kurtz, and Brian Singer Towns, was published by Saint Mary's Press in 2004. This research was a project of the Center for Ministry Development that was developed in collaboration with the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry and Saint Mary's Press. (<https://www.cmdnet.org/cmdstore/product/3-effective-practices-for-dynamic-youth-ministry>)

*Assessing Christian Discipleship Formation in Catholic Youth Ministry* is a dissertation by Jeffrey Kaster submitted in October 2008 to the faculty of the graduate school of the University of Minnesota. (<https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/46868>)

*The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry* by Rollie Martinson, Wes Black, and John Roberto, published by Lifelong Faith Associates, 2008. This research was funded by the Lilly Foundation and focused upon 475 congregations in seven denominations: Roman Catholic, United Methodist, Presbyterian, Covenant, Southern Baptist, Assemblies of God, and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. (<http://www.exemplarym.com/>)



*Growing Catholics: Factors Influencing the Faith Development of Religiously-Active Youth* by Michael Carotta and Charlotte McCorquodale, published by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, February 2012.