

SETTING UP A YOUTH SVP GROUP

YOUTH



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(YWG ed.2 – nymo site edition Dec 2002)

Youth SVP, the young people's arm of the Society of St Vincent de Paul which is familiar for its quiet practical work in many of our parishes, is one of the brightest success stories in Catholic youth ministry in the last few years.

Its aims are :-

"To develop young people personally, socially and spiritually by offering volunteering opportunities to help and support people in need in the community"

Since its re-launch in the mid-90's Youth SVP has expanded with an energy unmatched by any Catholic youth movement. The appointment of a full-time development officer, Paul Lever, and the establishment of a network of Youth Development Officers and Field Workers, has facilitated the setting-up of dozens of groups in parishes and schools, and several thousand teenagers have taken part in Youth SVP activities.

As well as the regular programme of meetings in the local groups, there is the 4-day residential "Camp Vincent" in the summer, usually at Ampleforth.

Apart from the energy and professionalism of its organisers, it does seem that the ethos of Youth SVP has tapped into a huge reservoir of altruism and big-heartedness on the part of young people around the country. Our own researches showed that older teenagers were not very keen on a straightforward "youth group" but were much more receptive towards a group which "did something" (a task-oriented activity), which could do some good to others, and could be visibly seen to be "making a difference" for some part of the community. Youth SVP has all these ingredients, as well as being local, sociable, rooted in prayer and tradition, and very highly acceptable to parish priests, pastoral councils and older parishioners!

There are several Youth SVP groups already established in our Diocese and there follow some details and comments from a few of them:-

Alice Murphy, St Bernards Convent School Slough – group established September 2000. Seven young people involved once a week, daytime meetings involving prayer, feedback on the nursing-home visits they undertake, and shared lunch. "The students have found it demanding but enjoyable and have learned a great deal in working with the elderly"

Tina Pierce, St Columba's, Chesham – group est. May 2001. Seven/eight young people meet weekly, for prayer, allocation of jobs/visits, agreement on return time. They visit residential care homes and individuals' homes, playing cards, dominoes, skittles, Scrabble etc or just talking to the elderly folk. "You need a very dedicated SVP mentor who is able to enthuse young people but it is extremely worthwhile. Growth all round ensues!"

Rod Isaacs & Michael Nataro, St Josephs, Gerrards Cross – group est. January 2000. Ten to fifteen young people meet weekly. Meet at church 3:30pm, visit residential homes, re-convene 5pm for reports, spiritual reading/tapes, planning. Also have guest speaker nights and take part in other youth activities in parish. "All you need is two or three well-motivated teenagers and people to visit – Go for it!"

Phil Hughes, St Teresa's, Princes Risborough – Group est. September 2001 – ten young people aged 14-22 meet weekly. Visits to local residential home, return, prayer, planning. Hope d to expand activities in post-exam time and visit "The Passage" homeless project in London. "You've got to persevere. It may take some months to get the right people, then you can let them lead it. It *will* succeed." (Phil is a former youth president for SVP Scotland so has a wealth of experience.)

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Although "visiting residential care homes" seems to be the principal activity, being relatively easy to arrange and not taking too long to undertake, other activities of Youth SVP groups reported in their national newsletter "Living" have included:

- Helping with after-school clubs at primary schools
- Helping children with learning difficulties
- Hospital voluntary work
- Fundraising for charities
- Children's clubs to give parents a break
- Children's liturgy in parishes

.... The possibilities are limited only by imagination, the time & abilities of the volunteers, and local needs

So how do you start one of these groups?

- I. The first step is to identify a Group Adviser – an adult who will oversee the working of the local group. No previous experience or SVP connection is necessary. It can be a teacher, youth worker, catechist, curate, pastoral worker etc. Two or three adults may wish to share the role.
- II. The second step is for that person to contact the national Youth Development Officer, Paul Lever, at 15 Hayfield Street, Liverpool, L4 0RU – phone 0151 263 2417, e-mail paulle@cybase.co.uk. Paul travels tirelessly round the country visiting and motivating local groups. He will equip you with literature, ideas, and the very well-made Youth SVP video "Seek for the hero inside yourself"
- III. Once the organisation and proposed programme is in place a Youth SVP Field Worker will return to give a presentation to an initial meeting of young people.

Youth SVP has the great advantage of being part of a national organisation for support and advice. We are very pleased to encourage the establishment of these groups! Go for it!