

# Research Report

## Young people, the Faith and Vocational Discernment

### Netherlands



## Introduction

This is the research report related to the situation of Dutch youth and the development in the field of the Catholic religion in the Netherlands. This document handles a number of assessments for which the Vatican has asked in the framework of the fifteenth General Synod of Bishops held in 2018 with the theme 'Young people, the Faith and Vocational Discernment'.

## Objective of the research

The research covers both quantitative and qualitative assessments of the situation in the Dutch ecclesiastical province. The results of the research should (bring about) answers to the research question about the living environment of youth and how the Roman Catholic Church can connect with them with a view to their entering into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

## Creation of this document

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 provide the answers to the questions that were prepared by the Vatican. They fulfil the instructions as they are stated to deliver the document.

## Sources

The sources consulted for this report have been included directly as footnotes wherever possible. The following organisations contributed to this document: the seven dioceses of Netherlands, the Central Bureau for Statistics [of the Netherlands] (CBS), the conference of Dutch religious (KNR); all priest and deacon educational institutes in the Netherlands.

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## 1. Statistical Data

Key figures	
Population of the Netherlands	16,979,120 <sup>1</sup>
Birth rate	172,500 <sup>2</sup>
Number and percentage of Catholics in the Netherlands	3,882,000 (that is 22.9% of the population in 2015) <sup>3</sup>
Average age (in the last 5 years) at which individuals married.	Between 2012 and 2016: Men: 37.3 and women: 34.1 <sup>4</sup>
Number of young people in NL (16-29) and their main activities	2,946,971 (that is 17% of the Dutch population) <sup>5</sup> of which <sup>6</sup> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 62.6% employed</li> <li>• 60.8% studying</li> <li>• 3.5% looking for work</li> <li>• 8.7% are neither working nor studying</li> </ul>
Development in the field of vocations	
Annual average number of people who begin their education to become priests	3,5
Average age of people who start their education to become priests	26
Average number novices per year	25
Average age of novices	Between 30 and 50 years
Average number of Roman Catholic wedding ceremonies	Between 2011 and 2015: 2320 weddings

<sup>1</sup>CBS (2017). *Bevolking kerncijfers*. Obtained 28 August 2017 from: [http://statline.cbs.nl/Statweb/publication/?DM=SLNL&PA=37296ned&D1=0,10,20,30,40,50,\(1-1\)-I&VW=T](http://statline.cbs.nl/Statweb/publication/?DM=SLNL&PA=37296ned&D1=0,10,20,30,40,50,(1-1)-I&VW=T)

<sup>2</sup>CBS (2017). *Geboorte; kerncijfers vruchtbaarheid, leeftijd moeder, regio*. Obtained 28 August 2017 from: <http://statline.cbs.nl/Statweb/publication/?DM=SLNL&PA=37201&D1=0-6&D2=0,85,127,167,725&d3=2,2,7,12,17,22,27-28&VW=T>

<sup>3</sup>Kaski (2017). *Onderzoek. Aantal katholieken per 31 december*. Obtained on 28 August 2017 from: [http://www.ru.nl/kaski/onderzoek/cijfers-rooms/virtuele\\_map/katholieken/](http://www.ru.nl/kaski/onderzoek/cijfers-rooms/virtuele_map/katholieken/)

<sup>4</sup>CBS (2017). *Huwen en partnerschapsregistraties; kerncijfers*. Obtained 28 August 2017 from: <http://statline.cbs.nl/Statweb/publication/?DM=SLNL&PA=37772ned&D1=0-34,41-53&D2=0,5,10,15,20,25,30,35,40,45,50,55,62-66&VW=T>

<sup>5</sup>CBS (2017). *Bevolking; geslacht, leeftijd en burgerlijke staat, 1 januari*. Obtained 28 August 2017 from: <http://statline.cbs.nl/Statweb/publication/?VW=T&DM=SLNL&PA=7461BEV&D1=0&D2=a&D3=1-27,101-105,121-123,131&D4=I&HD=110621-1139&HDR=T,G3,G1&STB=G2>

<sup>6</sup>In 2015, the 15-27-year age group numbered 2,512,000 young people. 1,573,400 of whom were working and 847,800 were enrolled in mainstream education. In all 1,527,900 young people were enrolled in mainstream education. The total number of young people registered as looking for work came to 88,900. 258,500 were neither in education nor employed, of which 39,300 were registered as looking for work. Source: CBS (2017). *Arbeidsmarktsituatie jongeren (15 to 27 year); regio (classification 2016)*. obtained 28 August 2017 from: <http://statline.cbs.nl/Statweb/publication/?DM=SLNL&PA=83663ned&D1=0&D2=a&D3=0-2&D4=a&D5=a&D6=0,6-17&D7=I&VW=T>

## 2. Interpretations of the situation

The Vatican drafted a questionnaire that was distributed in the Dutch dioceses in the spring of 2017. The questionnaires were then processed by the diocesan youth workers and the pastoral setting of the parishes. Young people themselves were involved in the questionnaire. In at least two dioceses, conferences were organised to go over the questions with the young people.

The questionnaire for the young persons' conference was followed up in July 2017 with a supplementary online survey research of young people.

### Objective

The objective of the results of the questionnaires is to help the ecclesiastical bodies to express their understanding of the world of young people and to reflect on their experience in the field of guiding vocations given the gathering of information for drafting the working document or *Instrumentum laboris*.

### a. Young people, the Church and the community

#### 1. How does the Church heed the living environment of young people?

In all of the answers given on the possibility of listening to the living environment of young people there appeared to be a clear opinion that the Church has the task of seeking out young people, of being present in their living environment, of listening to them and of teaching the Gospel in such a way that it speaks to the young people. There are certainly clear differences that can be seen regarding how successful people believe it has been.

There are pastoral teams who see opportunities for developing various initiatives to reach young people. Generally, youth work is given a specific place and/or specific attention, sometimes even in the form of a portfolio manager. These pastoral teams showed successful examples of bridging the gap between the Church and the living environment of the young people and that gives them confidence.

It is also clear that this has long not been the case for all pastoral teams. In general some teams feel a little uncomfortable approaching young people. They see that a large number of priests and church volunteers struggle with today's youth culture. They see a certain gap between the world in which people in the church are working and the living environment of the young people in this community. Chaplains from a number of parishes report that they have few personal conversations with young people; the contact is mostly in the margins of church activities and they struggle with how to interact with today's young people.

#### **Concrete examples on how the Church in the Netherlands listens to the environment inhabited by young people:**

1. By being present in the (living) environment of young people, for example, school visits, interviews with teachers and through student pastoral care services.
2. By being active on the internet and especially on social media.
3. By combining various activities for young people like celebration, catechesis and meeting in a conference or at least one of these activities is present: conferences during activities for reflection and more active activities for altar boys and acolytes, leading and participating in bible groups, youth groups, catechism groups, youth choirs, youth trips, camps, diaconal youth activities, meetings to prepare for the Sacrament of the Holy Communion, follow-up conferences for the World Youth Days. These offer opportunities for (pastoral) interviews with young people.
4. By paying attention to young people who come to church or participate in its liturgical and diaconal services; whereby some indicate that the mystery of the Eucharist is not understood and experienced enough.

5. By giving them responsibility and offering them the opportunity to put their talent to good use. By means of a youth platform, they organise in partnership with the diocesan activities and offer input for the annual programme and policy.

## **2. These days, what are the biggest challenges and the greatest opportunities for youth in your country?**

### **Challenges:**

- We see a secularised world where God is pushed to the background and atheism and 'my own I' appear to be dominant. In addition, young people were not given much catholic faith by their parents. In society, we speak very rarely of God and His Love, religion has become a private matter. Religious youth who are searching are vulnerable and it takes a great deal of courage on their parts to carry on, certainly now that they are in the minority.
- Culture places the emphasis on creating your own happiness and so there is more pressure to make good choices. This is compounded by the high degree of materialism and consumerism. However, they are overwhelmed by the options as regards religion, spirituality, philosophies, sports, friends, music, work, education and so on. This greater freedom makes choosing more difficult; there is a fear of excluding options. Young people are thus under pressure and are stressed when facing choices. By being overwhelmed by the possibilities of choices of religion, spirituality and philosophy, there is a greater subjective consideration of the proclamation of the truth. They will often also not connect to one group or association but will instead try to keep all their options open.
- The ever-widening digital world results in pressure to be online and available at all times, contact is becoming increasingly superficial and life full of stimuli and information. Social media also creates group pressure: without social media "you don't belong", you really do "have to" participate. Also, the photos and stories on social media show only a "perfect world", making young people feel they have to live a perfect and interesting life at all times. Young people have to live in a world that is constantly ranking.
- The focus on economy and performance is thus called a cultural feature. The emphasis is on studying and building a career. At school, but also in the work environment, there is a great drive for perfection and the requirements set are getting higher. At the same time, there is a great uncertainty about finding appropriate education, a place on the job and housing markets and a good partner. Although unemployment is decreasing, many young people are only being offered 2-year temporary contracts and will then have to start their search again for another job. This means there is uncertainty about their future and this limits their ability to build financial security.
- Society offers ample freedom and choice when it comes to drink, drugs and other temptations. In addition, they worry about the various wars, terror (threats) and the resulting fears.
- For many young people the Church has a very dull and boring image, is "out of touch" with today and its challenges and has many internal problems (church closures, abuse). The relevance of the Church and religion is difficult to communicate in a world where most young people (believe they) are already happy.

### **Opportunities:**

The opportunities have already been mentioned in the description of the challenges of young people:

- There are many possibilities for allowing young people to become familiar with the Church's tradition in all fields (liturgy, catechism, diaconate) without imposing anything on them, being welcoming and approachable.
- There are many possibilities for allowing young people to become familiar with diversity in the community (community work placements, contacts with the disabled, the elderly, the homeless and the poor) and to help them with questions about the meaning of life (helping them to express these questions, to think about them).
- There are also groups of young people who have very few preconceived ideas where the Church is concerned. They remain open to its message, without preconceptions, as long as it is genuine.

- Activities for young people, visits to cloisters, World Youth Days, return days, youth days and diaconal youth activities can offer today's young people the room they urgently need to discover the Gospels and to learn to live them.
- Discipleship, that is, accompanying young people on the way to making them pupils of Jesus, is bearing fruit. This is often small scale, but it still appears as though it helps young people find their way with God and to grow in faith and in their personal development. For instance, there are the new movements and initiatives where this is taking place (Focolare, Emmanuel, the Freres de saint Jean Netherlands, Follow Me, Life Teen, Foyer de Charité, etc.)
- Modern social media also offer opportunities to inform young people about the Gospels, the vocation and happiness about life. Also, there are many youth activities that use social media to reach and gather young people.
- Once young people are engaged, they start seeking out more responsibility. The younger generation is frequently more creative in coming up with new initiatives and forms of Church, without giving up the orthodox catholic belief in its rites.

### **3. What kinds of and places for youth meetings – institutionalised or otherwise – are a great success in the Church, and why?**

Nearly everywhere in the country we see that a combination of learning (catechism), celebrating, serving (diaconate) and community/meeting works best. Often, activities also regularly include at least two of these elements, but mostly more. The appeal to youth, it was explained, lies in the authenticity of the personal effort, taking the creed and church liturgy seriously, the approachability of the priest concerned and the use of social media. Other places and elements that are still necessary are, amongst other things, places where young people can find a bit of peace and quiet, where they can discuss their faith and ecumenism.

- The most frequently named by far are activities that are beyond the local community. These are supportive incentives in local groups who are seen as the most important factor.
- This offers young people the chance to meet like-minded people (sometimes even worldwide), to escape the daily grind and to make time for themselves, to focus intensely on faith and to further discover and deepen it in community with other young people. Many of the activities listed are: World Youth Days (WYD), Taizé, pilgrimages, The Passion (contemporary translation of the Way of the Cross), the *Stille Omgang* ("Silent Walk", a 1345 procession in Amsterdam commemorating a Eucharistic miracle).
- Local and regional activities like preparing for confirmation in the form of a camping weekend and/or confirmation day, Christmas celebration, youth choirs, theatre productions, youth groups targeting diaconal activities (M25 groups) and so on.
- Activities, like Cloister weekends, organised by congregations. Also specifically mentioned are initiatives of the Servants of the Lord and the Virgin of Matara / SSVM ('School of vocation') and the Freres de saint Jean Netherlands ('Meet the monk')
- Various activities from new movements and initiatives. Specifically, KISI-Kids (an international group of children, young people and adults who set out to bring the Good News of Jesus to people.)
- Amongst the series of successful initiatives, the monthly diocesan youth conferences Tour of Faith also always appear (in which the bishop offers a Eucharist celebration, a religious discussion and a meal, each time in a new parish and mostly with the local youth group playing host) and initiatives of the 'School of vocation' and Meet the monk'. The importance of authenticity of personal dedication is also mentioned for the visits young

people make to the Sisters of Mother Theresa, where they see that there really are street and homeless people and that there are believers who make an effort for these people based on their religious beliefs.

#### **4. What kinds and places of conferences for young people, institutionalised or otherwise, are very successful outside the church and why?**

- ‘The Passion’ was mentioned many times. Every year on Maundy Thursday, the EO and KRO broadcasters organise a musical representation of the Passion story with the assistance of Dutch artists and using Dutch songs in The Passion.
- Moreover, music and dance festivals and sporting events are considered successful meeting places outside the Church. Pinkpop Festival annually attracts 60,000 people, predominantly young people. But sporting events also attract hundreds of thousands of young people. Music appears to be the connecting factor and one might suspect that experiencing pleasure, belonging to a group and escaping the daily grind play important roles.
- We are also thinking of initiatives that remember the nearest, like Serious Request (an annual action by the Dutch radio station NPO 3FM which collects a few million [Euros] for projects by the Dutch Red Cross), and the silent marches on the occasion of dramatic events like attacks and murder, in which silence is observed so as to be able poignantly to express and share collective experience of shock and dismay.
- Some Catholic youth also seek out Protestant-Christian and evangelical activities like youth days, festivals and conferences and (worship) concerts by national and international Christian churches and music groups.
- In general, night life like discotheques, where young people have fun with each other, can ‘go crazy’, can experiment with starting relationships, explore limits (for example, with alcohol).

#### **5. What are young people of today really asking of the Church in your country?**

- In a chaotic world, the challenge facing the Church is to let the message of protest be heard calmly, in silence, in the community, with acceptance, clearly, full of love and somewhere where God and Jesus are at the centre. Somewhere where young people get answers to questions about existence and the meaning of life.
- In addition, young people need genuine, young examples in belief, within and beyond the community.
- It is important for young people that they see in the liturgy genuine attention to and love for God, Jesus, the saints and the sacredness. They don’t come to Church for something that they could easily get elsewhere, but look for strongly genuine, and even radical religious experience. This radicalisation is significant, not afraid of proclaiming the Teachings of the Church and speaking about truth, even when this is uncomfortable. Young people are hungry for truth.
- As regards the community, they are looking for contact and genuinely experienced loving relationships that last. They are looking for a young community, one where the youth and older generations all feel at home. One-to-one guidance (from laypeople, people who are close by), but also from each other. Young people want to know that they are seen, known and loved and that we are not afraid to invest in them!
- Furthermore, young people want to feel like their talents, opinions, ideas and so on are being taken seriously. They don’t want to be patronised, but would rather be involved and participate. Discovering, engaging and helping develop their talents is a challenge. Give them responsibility as soon as they are able to handle it. Give young people the chance to do things “their way”, for example, using new media, and so on.
- With respect to the mission, it is good for the Church to show where it stands, both nationally and internationally. The Church should convey this more in action.



- Young people are also looking for a serious and positive explanation of the doctrine of faith, religious life and the Church's liturgy, where there is room to discover.

## **6. What possibilities are there in your country for young people to participate**

There are possibilities to participate:

- In the traditional roles as altar boy, reader, manager, leader of ancillary services and catechism projects, music/choir, etc.
- In the Church community: youth celebrations, youth choirs, diaconal group, trips, diaconal M25 groups.
- In cross-parish activities: summer camps, education weekends, youth platform, diocesan youth programmes, student pastoral care.
- With religious and new movements that regularly invite young people for religious and cultural activities, diaconal projects, prayer meetings, visiting days, etc.

Many also point out that there are many opportunities for young people to participate in the life of the church community. However, they had to acknowledge that this is unfortunately also lacking in many places (or too little effort is made) for various reasons (ageing, polarisation, too much inward focus) whereby the true involvement of young people in the church community is minimal.

## **7. How and in what way is contact sought with young people who do not come to a church environment?**

By allowing priests, deacons, religious and pastoral workers be present:

- At schools and universities through student pastoral services, through creating an interest amongst religion and philosophy teachers for (social and/or evangelising) projects and work placements. By appointing professors and guest lecturers to public universities where young people can become familiar with the Catholic intellectual tradition. By inviting them to join a tour of the Church. By organising activities on existential questions.
- Through the internet, social media (YouTube, Facebook and Twitter) and through regular media like TV and radio (KRO-NCRV).
- By occupying a place in the non-religious environments, being actively present in the local community. Participating in current events, hangout spots (street pastoral work), at parties and festivals (evangelical groups). Setting up or acting as spiritual worker in Catholic youth organisations, like Catholic scouts.
- By being involved diaconally in the community and thereby collaborating with other (non-religious) organisations. We might consider challenges for children from families with very small budgets; activities for teen mothers, organised by the PCI and through the M25 project.
- By motivating and equipping Catholic youth to talk about their religion with their peers (evangelising), and then inviting anyone with whom they are speaking to join activities and come to meetings in the church setting, organised by parishes, movements, religious leaders, etc.
- Furthermore, a few possibilities were mentioned for street actions (like handing out candles at the Silent Walk Amsterdam youth programme).

## **b. Pastoral vocational programmes for youth**

### **8. How are families and communities involved in discerning vocations for youth?**

- Many indicate that in the parish, families and communities are not involved enough in discerning vocations for youth. Where it does happen, it is kept to the edges in the preparation and celebration and attention is limited to prayer in the celebrations and sometimes in sermons.
- Further, we see that discerning vocations (also in the broader sense of the expression) is given a place within youth and family work at the diocesan level in personal conversations and pastoral guidance. Especially during family meetings, summer camps, youth weekends, confirmation day and occasionally at parish family activities.
- There are also certain regions where there is an extensive network of people who pray for vocations or where there is a vocation platform with representatives from parishes, religious and new movements. It organises visits from priests and religious to all kinds of activities in the family ministry. There is also awareness of the annual Orientation Day for Priest and Deacon Education when the entire religious community is involved in the interest of vocations for the Church.
- Furthermore, we see that within the new movements and communities there is a great deal of attention paid to discerning vocation.

### **9. How do schools and universities or other educational institutions (social or church) contribute to the education of youth as regards discerning their vocation?**

Generally, schools and universities play several major active roles in the choosing jobs and minor roles in discerning vocations. In places where attention is paid to discerning vocations, this occurs by means of guest lectures given by priests, religious and (lay)missionaries, by good catechism and philosophy instruction, evangelical projects, visits and tours of the Church and/or an active student pastoral service. However, the opportunities to pay attention to this depends on the school and teachers and this is frequently within a secular, multi-religious environment.

### **10. In what way do you take into consideration the cultural changes that result from the development of the digital world?**

The pastoral teams are aware that the living environment of young people is marked by an abundance of information, various philosophies and ways of life which confront them on the internet and in social media. Not everyone is successful at benefiting from digital media, but where it does happen, it remains limited in most cases to sending information (newsletters, articles, announcements, etc.) via the internet or on social media. Some answers suggest that sometimes young people are deliberately enlisted to shape these digital information channels. In this way, they can make a concrete effort for the Church of the future.

### **11. How can the World Youth Day or other national and international events be part of ordinary pastoral practice?**

Pastoral teams list as positive elements that could possibly make a contribution:

- If a member of the pastoral team from a parish travels with the group, as supervisor, on a World Youth Day trip, this will assure on completion positive and lasting contacts with the participating youth.
- There are also positive experiences when a parish organises, after a World Youth Day, follow-up meetings at which the youth can continue to meet each other and continue to explore their belief.
- One possibility should be to make one pastor, religious or layperson within the pastoral team responsible for the youth ministry and to allow this person to be the guide before, during and after the WYD. Someone who cares about young people and can walk along with and guide them on their journey through life.

- The WYD and other activities/trips should not be promoted as “distinct, autonomous activities”, but rather allowed to be a part of a thorough and well-designed pre- and post-programme for everyday life, something that begins well before the trip and is also continued after the trip.

## **12. How are young people in your diocese given formative experiences and how are paths for vocation ministry for young people developed?**

Although, generally there are no specific paths mentioned, there are various formative activities where vocation is brought into focus, like spiritual deepening, days/weekends for reflection in a cloister, leadership training, diaconal projects, alter boy days, preparatory session(s) for events (e.g., for the World Youth Days), silent retreats, meeting activities with celebrations and ‘workshops’ for spiritual deepening. At many of these formative activities for young people, there are opportunities for personal guidance. In addition, seminars play an important role with respect to open house days, personal conversations, etc.

## **c. The Guides**

### **13. How much time and in what way do priests and other people with responsibilities invest in giving young people training in personal spiritual guidance?**

Generally, it is found that there is relatively little time invested and it varies greatly from parish to parish. The reason given is that often there are no young people and priests and other members of the pastoral teams generally do not have a great deal of contact with young people. Where there is contact, efforts are made to make church life in the parish attractive by, for example, appointing young people as acolytes or readers. In addition to priests, we see that youth workers see themselves as the spiritual guides for the young people.

Places where relatively speaking a great deal of time has been invested include, in particular, the student pastoral services, personal conversations at events, camps and weekends, youth platforms, youth groups and teen groups. It was also noted that priests and religious from cloisters, congregations and new movements spend a great deal of time personally and spiritually guiding young people.

### **14. Which initiatives and educational paths are established for the vocational guides?**

The vocational guides are priests who were trained in the seminary. From the answers from the parishes, it is clear that priests who give this guidance use their own experience and their own insight. Religious have their own paths for this.

### **15. What personal guidance is offered at seminaries?**

Guidance by the rector, study rector, teachers and spirituals, in addition to an *ad hoc* psychologist. In all priesthood training, there are also staff priests for personal guidance (spiritual/intellectual guide and confessor). In addition, there are mentors/coaches and supervisors.

## **d. Specific questions (Europe)**

### **a. How do you help young people to look to the future with trust and hope, based on the wealth of the Christian roots of young people?**

Offering core values of religion was mentioned as important several times. Some explored this further by placing at the centre the person of Jesus Christ with his love, salvation and the challenge that He gives young people. The personal relationship with Christ and the strength from His presence in, particularly, the sacraments of Eucharist and Penance and atonement ensures a trusting look at the future in both personal and professional lives.

Others emphasised the importance of Catholic social teaching. This is understood to mean a moral climate created by the church, human dignity and the diaconal contract.

In short, the objective is to return young people who are on their journeys to the roots of their religion and the essentials in Christianity to build from here hope and trust in the future.

**b. Young people often feel set aside and shut out by the political, economic and social system in which they live. How do you listen to this critical potential and this protest so that it can be converted into suggestions and collaboration?**

A large number of respondents challenged the assertion in this question. The majority felt fortunate and the thoughts of protest present amongst young people is particularly inherent to development of identity in adolescence.

It can be seen that young people are critical when things go unfairly or dishonestly (in their eyes) or when they are not heard or are not taken seriously. Concretely, there was mention of the willingness to take part in the work process and of their sometimes feeling shut out of the Church because it is a tight and closed community that does not make a person feel welcome or at home.

As a solution, the importance of listening to the experiences and critique of young people was primarily suggested. Then to offer them support, involve them, give them responsibility so that they can truly make the right decisions.

**c. At what levels do the relationships between the generations still work? If they don't work anymore, how can they be reactivated?**

In general, it could be said that there is greater equivalence between generations than there was a few decades ago. One of the reasons for this is that parents have cultural and moral opinions that don't differ from those of their children. Another is the rising cost of studying, or the failure of a relationship<sup>7</sup>. Despite the good relationships between (grand)parents and children/young people, religion and the Church do not play a big role here.

The various activities of the pastoral teams were mentioned as was the desire to strengthen the intergenerational relationships:

1. Thus, in many parishes, family activities are organised, with the goal of giving (more) room within families (and thus inter-generationally) for discussions about religious issues.
2. Also, in many parishes, diaconal youth activities are organised whereby young people prepare a meal for the elderly or organise an entertaining afternoon.

In activities involving catechism and youth activities, worshippers are sometimes invited to speak with the young people about how they can shape religion in their lives. In these conversations, the gap between the generations is bridged. Also, where young people visit, for example, the Sisters of Mother Teresa and are affected by the way in which they shape their vocation, contact develops and bridges generational divides.

Finally, mention can be made of the fact that in youth activities, volunteers are often active who are a (little) older than the participating young people. In the essence of the activity itself, a bond again develops across the generations.

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<sup>7</sup> CBS (2016). *Jongeren blijven langer bij ouders* thus. Obtained on 28 August 2017 from: <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2016/27/jongeren-blijven-langer-bij-ouders-thuis>

### 3. Best Practices

#### 1. List the most important forms of pastoral activities related to guiding and discernment of vocations in your situation.

The pastoral teams listed the following pastoral activities:

1. Personal meetings that in some parishes are offered consciously and explicitly as a follow-up to youth activities.
2. Diocesan youth conferences and in particular youth weekends, pilgrimages including projects and courses.
3. Initiatives of the religious, like cloister days, etc.
4. Orientation days for training Priests and Deacons.
5. Primary and secondary school visits by priests and religious.

#### 2. A few examples

##### Samuel project

- **Description:** For a few years as a diocese, we have been running Cardinal Martini's (of Milan) *Samuel-projekt* (the Samuel Project), whose content includes, first, meetings of young people interested in a mission using a *lectio divina* and, second, a regular personal meeting with a guide. It was organised by the pastoral vocation committee in the diocese and borne by priests and religious.
- **Assessment:** the theoretical basis is to help young people separate the Spirit from God through reading and meditation of the Scriptures, and introduce them to everyday experiences, so that the movements of the Holy Ghost are observed and distinguished, to then in exchanges and personal meetings develop the impact of the Holy Ghost in their own hearts and be confirmed ecclesiastically.
- **Evaluation:** Several young people have found their vocation for religious life in this way. Moreover, a vocation has also been discovered for starting a family.

##### Christmas charity dinner

- **Description:** Young people ensure that street and homeless people in the city have a Christmas dinner and celebrate Christmas with them. This is an activity that young people thought up, set up and carried out themselves (with supervision).
- **Analysis:** After a word of welcome, a homeless person spoke about his experiences and what others (and the Church) meant to him in this regard. This was followed by an in-depth introduction by one of the young people about why belief and Bible make it important to undertake this activity (Mt. 25) and what we can mean for others. The emphasis here is on "not only help them but also treat them as equals and become their friends" and offer them a real Christmas atmosphere. Then they set to work: 47 young people cooked, made Christmas packages (with their own items and items gathered beforehand) and gave the room a Christmas atmosphere to ensure the street and homeless people had a wonderful Christmas dinner. Thirty-five street and homeless people came to dinner and there were some fantastic conversations between them and the young people. Afterwards, there were 37 Christmas packages provided by the street ministry, so the street and homeless people who came to the celebration on Christmas Day were also given a Christmas package. Finally, everything was tidied away and there was a review of the activity and the effect it has on young people (during the activity and in day-to-day life).

- *Evaluation:* The young people were given freedom and responsibility to set it up and in this way give other young people and street and homeless people a special day. Diaconal activities give young people the means to put their belief into practice. Adding a substantive introduction and reflecting on the activity afterwards certainly increases awareness and can ensure other choices in their lives. This activity offered young people a positive experience with the Church, where they could themselves put their beliefs to work on something concrete.

## **Tour of Faith**

- This activity is interesting and relevant because it (1) tries to retain the positive experiences from the internationally organised World Youth Day (which was identified in the responses as *the* example of a successful youth event) and (2) thereby works according to a model that is considered by many pastoral teams as being attractive to young people: celebrating, catechism and meeting in a single combined activity.
- Tour of Faith is a monthly event. In a diocesan parish, moving from one spot to another, there is a Eucharist celebration, followed by a religious discussion and concluded with a simple meal. Unique to the Tour of Faith is that the diocesan Bishop is always present at this youth activity.
- During the Tour of Faith, participants are always given an opportunity for confession and, twice a year, a celebration of charity with confession is organised in the context of Tour of Faith so that young people can choose a priest to help them develop their consciences in light of God's charity, and, if possible, begin on a path of spiritual guidance.
- Tour of Faith is usually hosted by a youth group or youth choir from the parish where it is held. The Bishop will act as chief celebrant and he will also take care of the religious discussion in which worshippers are regularly invited to share how they use their religious belief in their lives.
- With a certain regularity, the rector of the centre for priest and deacon education is also present to talk with the young people about vocation. In addition, religious, volunteers from the Sant'Egidio movement, organisers of the World Youth Day trip, amongst others, come to speak. The programme is fully open to exchange and discussion.