The Church and Youth Ministry

"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity." (1 Timothy 4:12)
Traditionally, youth is considered to be a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. Most times, people use the word 'teenager' when referring to youth. There are no agreed defined age boundaries for being youth.

I

N recent days, I read an article by the Barna Group with the title: Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church. In the article, some of the reasons that were cited as not attracting young people to the church were: 1. Christians demonizing everything outside the church. 2. Christians ignoring the problems of the real world. 3. Church being too concerned that movies, music, and video games are harmful. The article is part of my reading list as I contemplate on vision formulation for the chaplaincy, and particularly on the subject of church growth. The major discussion on the mission of our chaplaincy and the wider church in general is on the future of the church especially with the ageing of the current membership. One wonders what the state of the church will be in the next fifty years. Our members are ageing and few young people are being attracted to the church. There is a general saying that says 'youths are the church of tomorrow' and I disagree with it because if they are the church of tomorrow, then who are they today? We cannot say our children are the family of tomorrow, they constitute the family today and tomorrow. The Bible has evidence of God calling youths to become prophets and kings and so they do not need to become adults to become part of the church. This is the reason why Paul is saying to Timothy, 'let no one despise you because you are young.'

Who are the youths? Traditionally, youth is considered to be a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. Most times, people use the word 'teenager' when referring to youth. There are no agreed defined age boundaries for being youth. I have seen other political leaders for the youth wing being in their sixties. Any meaningful discussion on the growth of the church should include investing in today's youth as a priority for ministry. According to Fr Pedro Zitha (OFM), "a world without youth is a world without a future, and if the church does not take care of youth it is like a house founded on sand." The world has become a difficult home for youth because of the socio-economic and political challenges that are being faced by many countries. Unemployment rates and conflicts are on the increase. Many youths are restless, insecure, jaded and search for the meaning of life. Fr Pedro further argues that "at times the world shows a negative and false image of youth, presenting it as lost in worldly things and without future." We forget that our primary duty is empowering young people to discover their true identity as living images of God and to live a dignified life. We often identify youths as generations that suffer crisis of religious, cultural, political, social and economic identity. What role have we played as adults in shaping their identity?

What then should we do as the church to promote youth ministry? The vision of the SS Philip and James chaplaincy is to be an inclusive church with doors open to all. It is a strong and godly vision but practically, how do we open the doors to the young people? First, our parish budget should also include youth ministry. That was not possible in the past two years because of the Covid-19 pandemic, but now as life is slowly going back to normal we need to set aside budget for youth ministry. Second, any discussion on youth ministry should include the youth themselves. It is difficult for us as adults to know and understand the needs of the young hence it is our prayer that on our vision formulation day early next year, one or two young people will be part of the team. The Diocese in Europe is taking youth ministry seriously and resources on the diocesan website link below are a testimony to the commitment. (https://europe.anglican.org/resources/youth-resources). As the Anglican chaplaincy in Majorca, we are committed to welcome all children of God regardless of any identity boundary. We are committed to dialogue with young people in exploring the future of the church.