

## ***On Being a Light to Others***

***Some forty-five youth ministers from all over Western Canada met in Winnipeg, from January 31 to February 3<sup>rd</sup> to build connections, grow as leaders and to learn how to better reach out to youths and meet them where they are at.***

***Organizers and participants take a look back at the annual gathering and AGM of the Western Canadian Association of Catholic Youth Ministers (WCACYM).***



**Jeannette Manser, Youth ministry coordinator for Red Deer Catholic Schools in Red Deer, Alberta, and Member at large for the WCACYM:**

I really appreciated our theme, REACH, which was all about being a light to people. That takes courage. And determination. We read and discussed Saint Paul, asking what he meant to us. Paul was unafraid to invite you to become part of a community of faith, or to have an experience of faith.

Deacon Doug Cross spoke about actively loving people. He told us about bringing special needs people in 2002 to World Youth Day in Toronto. At first, some didn't want them there. They didn't want to accommodate them. But the entire group came together because of the special needs people, who were so happy. They felt love because they belonged. That's our calling. We have a responsibility to reach out, and love people as they are and where they are at.

**Braden Kuntz, vice-chair person of WCCAYM, and a Youth ministry coordinator for the Archdiocese of Regina, Saskatchewan:**

This was my sixth annual gathering. What I love about our coming together is that we can network. It's an opportunity to learn from others or to share what you know. I got to take a fresh look at something I've been staring at forever.



The gathering is also a great place for support. We not only got to share resources, but our struggles. We can vent, talk about what works and what doesn't. But my favourite moments are those late night gab sessions with people I haven't seen for a year. It's like hanging out with family.



**Liz Artymko, Youth and young adult coordinator for the Ukrainian Catholic Redemptorists, at St. Joseph's parish in Winnipeg:**

Having a community of youth ministers is very important. I've often felt alone in the Archeparchy of Winnipeg, since our numbers aren't what they could be. It's very daunting. To have a support system from other youth ministers, people who understand what I'm going through, is really something.

Concretely, I got a lot of info from our gathering. The conference did a good job of giving us practical resources and tools, as well as spiritual ones. We learned many new approaches to accompany young people.

**OJ Rivera, full time pastoral worker for Couples for Christ Youth, in Vancouver, British Columbia:**

We did something quite daring. Like Saint Paul, 35 of us went out to talk about Christ in a public place. We split into three groups. Mine went to The Forks. I addressed people randomly, sharing a random Bible verse and encouraging them to pray with me. Some accepted. Others didn't. It's not easy sharing Christ, especially in a culture that is very fixated on being individualistic. Plus, it's so much easier to stand with the crowd than to stand out of it.



Still, there were quite a few positive reactions. Many who were raised Catholic, or in a Christian faith tradition. They appreciated something that isn't done normally. It felt good to have a conversation about faith, and to share a Bible passage that might be random but may still have significance for people later down the line. That brief contact might be fruitful for them. The Spirit could be working there. We need to do this more. The call to community is for everyone. No one is meant to be left alone.



**Yssa Licsi, Youth and Young Adult Ministry Director of St. Boniface:**

We're called to journey together. It was inspiring to see how very much alive youth ministry is in Western Canada, and how everyone was hungry for communication.

We got to see what we lacked and what talents we can bring to one another. We also shared our struggles and blessings within

the ministry and how we can accompany one another. We can all be both a Paul and a Timothy to each other.

Of course, this was the first time I helped organize a WCACYM annual gathering. I love working with John Acosta, from the Archdiocese of Winnipeg, and Liz Artymko, from the Archeparchy of Winnipeg. In preparing for our gathering, we got to know each other, as well as the youth groups in our dioceses. We made connections that will last and help us organize city or province wide events.

To view a photo gallery of the WCACYM Annual Gathering, [click here](#).

