

Youth ministers learn new tools for evangelization at conference

BY REGINA CONTRERAS, YOUTH SPEAK NEWS SPECIAL, FROM THE CATHOLIC REGISTER
November 25, 2016

<http://www.catholicregister.org/ysn/ysn-news/item/23667-youth-ministers-learn-new-tools-for-evangelization-at-conference>



The Canadian Catholic Youth Ministry Network celebrated the end of the Year of Mercy during its annual conference.

Photo courtesy of CCYMN

Youth ministry is about awakening souls and being alive in God's love and mercy, said Dan DeMatte, the keynote speaker at last week's Canadian Catholic Youth Ministry Network conference.

"As people of the Catholic Church, our calling and mission is to give our lives to a cause so much bigger than ourselves," he said.

The CCYMN Conference took place in Winnipeg, Nov. 18-20, 2016. DeMatte led more than 150 participants into three sessions on bringing the Lord's mercy back into our ministry. He said that in trusting and recognizing the spirit of God, youth ministers are better able to fulfill the Lord's plans and understand what He desires from us.

The theme of the conference was “Got Mercy?” During the weekend, participants marked the end of the Jubilee Year of Mercy by reflecting on sharing God’s mercy to the youth they serve. But the highlight of the conference was the wide range of practical workshops.

Cameron Turner, Quebec coordinator of NET Canada, presented a workshop about “Relational Ministry,” explaining the importance of breaking down barriers with youth. Turner said the greatest need that young people have is to belong, and to go where the young people are and best serve and engage them. “The easiest and only sure way to bring youth to Christ is to build relationships with them,” he said.

Fellowship and quality time, Turner said, builds a foundation of trust in an open setting, that can develop and grow into life-giving and Christ-centred relationships. He said we cannot force religion. Instead, youth ministers must trust that in due time, youth will open up to Christ, just as they have opened up to us.

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The discussion and sharing of thoughts and ideas after each workshop really helped build unity. The conference gives youth ministers the opportunity to encourage one another and share with one another tips and tricks that have worked for them within their own ministries.

Christian Martinez, director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg, said what he desires most participants to take away from this conference is hope.

“Hope despite statistics and stigmas of the Catholic Church and youth,” he said. “As youth ministers, we want to utilize and recognize the beauty and blessing of youth and to be agents of change in the lives of the young people.”

(Contreras, 21, is a fourth-year creative communications student at the University of Winnipeg.)