

## Get Fair about Young People

by Danny Curtin, YCW President

Young people are so important – so precious. As we say in the YCW, they are worth more than all the gold in the world because they are sons and daughters of God. Yet, as a Church we are in danger of not recognising the true nature and value of a huge number of young people. In fact, we are in danger of not recognising them at all. There are a growing number of young people, distanced from the Church and the structures of society, who are being forgotten. Hundreds of thousands live in isolation, be it due to deprivation, social exclusion, a lack of opportunities, or a lack of decent employment. It is time to address this. It is time to get fair about our young people.

I am increasingly aware that those working with young people, including ourselves in the YCW, are in danger of falling into a comfort trap where we only develop initiatives which appeal to those who are the easiest to engage. Of course, attracting any young person is a challenge, but as I travel

from parish to parish I see that our Catholic youth ministry tends to attract a disproportionate number of socially included, financially comfortable, educated young people.

### “20% of all 16-24 year olds are in poverty”

For example, I am sure that most of the young adults who went to World Youth Day in Sydney will go to university, are there at present, or have already got their degree. They are simply reflective of the young adults who are active in our parishes. Yet only 39% of young people actually go to university. Moreover, I don't believe we are engaging the huge numbers of young people struggling in life, suffering real isolation and deprivation. It is time to look at our own work, develop new initiatives and get fair about our approach.

The challenge to get fair about young people is first of all a call to take stock. We need to look at who our specialised youth work/ministries are engaging and

how it is really making an impact in the wider Church and world. Recognising that there is a challenge is in itself a huge task. Only then will we see the need to actively develop a preferential option for those young people who are isolated, disadvantaged, disengaged, and lacking opportunity.

Even though more than 2 in 5 UK adults do not believe there is poverty in the UK, the true statistics, by the government's own measure are astounding. 12.8 million live in poverty. 32% of all under 18s are poor. They simply do not have an adequate income to live on. For me, perhaps the most startling truth is that more than 20% of all 16-24 year olds are in poverty. That means that more than 1 in every 5 young adults struggle to find enough money to eat healthily, buy clothes for a job interview and most likely have to go into debt to afford the basics. It is getting worse. The unemployment rate is four times that of older workers, and rising. As the cost of living increases

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## 7th International Council

The seventh International Council of the ICYCW was held in Paris from 21 June to 5 July 2008. The International Council is the decision-making body of the ICYCW (International Coordination of the Young Christian Workers), which meets every four years. Delegates from 34 of the 62 countries where the YCW is present were in attendance.

During the first week, the Council reflected on “the quality of life of young workers”, working from an international survey carried out during the four years since the last International Council. Fr Jose-Maria Rubio, a former international chaplain, explained that “the quality of life means every aspect of that life – the material and spiritual, the bodily and intellectual, the moral and aesthetic, the personal and community. For us, the quality of life is not so much a stage or a situation as a dynamic, a way of living.”

The Council also discussed the “Future Plan”, which governs the work of the ICYCW over the next four years. The future plan from the 2008 Council included improved communications between movements; development and growth of the YCW in countries where it doesn't yet exist or is very young; external relations; formation and accompaniment on the YCW



Some of the delegates including English YCW Angela Clapham (front).

fundamentals; actions and visibility. Five resolutions were passed, on the relations with JOCI; on external relations; on the working structures; budgeting; and on the conclusions and follow-up of the international enquiry on the lives of young workers in an age of globalisation.

During the Council the new International President, Hyo Jung Park, known as Seraphina, from South Korea, and the new International General Secretary, Jules, from Benin, were elected. They will take up their posts in Rome in October.

there are still more than two-thirds of young workers (aged 18-21) earning less than £7 an hour.

Equally shocking is the reality of education. The majority of adults I have spoken to think that most young people go to university, when only 40% actually do. More striking still is that a quarter of all 19 years olds in the UK do not have a basic qualification (5 good GCSEs or equivalent).

These are not the young people who the Church is in touch with, yet surely these are the young people for whom we should have a preferential option. Getting fair as a Church about our outreach to these young people will involve asking big questions. For



**The YCW is one of only three Catholic organisations (the others being Caritas Social Action and the Cardinal Hume Centre) to be part of Get Fair, a coalition of more than 50 organisations aiming to eradicate poverty in the UK by 2020.**

One way of doing this is for supporters, and society, to better understand the causes of being poor, and, just as important, what it means to be poor. We also need to remind our politicians that making poverty history should apply in this country, as well as globally.

In a society which is driven by consumerism, in which people are valued according to their possessions and the latest trends, to live in poverty is, effectively, to be excluded from society. It is right that the YCW, which works to ensure that young people are included in society, should be a part of this campaign.

To sign up visit [www.getfair.org.uk](http://www.getfair.org.uk)

example, we should address the justice issues surrounding spending money on WYD. Can we justify some 2000 young people from England and Wales having a fantastic spiritual experience in Sydney at the cost of nearly £4 million?

If we encourage all those who put so much work into raising all that money to engage their resources and energies closer to home we will move mountains. Imagine if, instead of waving flags at the Sydney Papal Mass standing next to pilgrims from Sudan (only a lucky few – just 44 – attended), our young people could be helped to build lasting relationships with young Sudanese refugees, living in overcrowded flats in north Manchester. Surely this legacy would be more substantial than WYD?

The YCW has joined the ‘Get Fair’ coalition, campaigning to eradicate UK poverty by 2020. We want to ensure that everyone has an income that meets minimum living standards, has affordable housing and decent neighbourhoods, and has fair access to services, without discrimination. These may sound like ambitious aims, but we are the fifth richest country in the world so it shouldn’t just be possible to eradicate poverty, it should be a given. Those of us who work with young people cannot fail but to play our part.

Across the country there are many examples of parishes, Catholic agencies and diocesan justice and peace projects making a real impact in these issues. Other members of the Get Fair coalition, for instance, include the Cardinal Hume Centre in London, transforming the lives of homeless young people. As a Church we still need to do more, following good examples where we see them.

We need a prophetic response, in word and in action. We need to be outspoken, for example, about the fact that the minimum wage is not nearly enough to live on. We need to be ready to campaign about a taxation system where the basic rate of income tax is unfair against the poorest, or to make a noise about the need to assist the most vulnerable through the winter with the rising costs of fuel. We should be outraged on these matters. The Church

should be outraged and, as those working with young people, we should stand up and say that our constituents are worth more than this.

Our outrage and words must turn into action, a practical response to help those living in fear of the next gas bill, or the young man in the low-paid job who cannot meet the increase in the cost of living. Our practical action needs to go beyond charity, stemming from a genuine belief that these young people are part of our Church, albeit that they are largely missing from our visible communities.

**“The Church is increasingly more and more ‘professional’ and, dare I say it, more and more appealing to the middle classes”**

Our action, then, will be action in solidarity. These young people are the experts about their own reality and as such have so much to give. If we discover genuine ways to engage these teenagers and young adults we would help to equip our parishes’ ability to respond to the stark reality of our own neighbourhoods. They themselves would bring with them the know how to build the kingdom of God amongst those in most need.

Arniel, a 20 year old from North London, is a great example of this. He lives with his mum and younger brother. His mum works all the hours she can to keep food on the table and the bills paid. Arniel has to work too, bringing money home from his two jobs. Needless to say, he didn’t get a chance to go on to further or higher education. The little money which he does keep from his wage he spends on his teenage brother, mostly on clothes, to help him stay proud amongst his school friends. It is, however, very noticeable that Arniel only has a few sets of clothes of his own. His pride will not allow him to accept charity for himself.

Let’s return to World Youth Day. Will it work for Arniel at WYD 2011 in Madrid? The WYD format is very successful and a lot of young people go

and have, not just a fantastic time, but a real strengthening of their faith. But does it really allow a fair participation from young people? What message are we sending to those who cannot afford it, and certainly cannot afford to take any time off their jobs, or their family life, to help a group to fundraise? For Arniel, getting time to go to Sunday Mass is quite enough effort, so going to WYD is beyond comprehension.

So if not WYD, what else? The popular diocesan Lourdes pilgrimages perhaps? Would Arniel and his peers find these appealing? Maybe, but I think Lourdes is another example of somewhere which, due to the nature of the English pilgrimages, not only requires young people who can pay (or fundraise) for their ticket, but also that they have access to a lot of spending money during the week in Lourdes. I wonder if we should ask pilgrimage directors whether 20% of their young adults are recruited from low income households suffering poverty. If not, we urgently need to ask why not?

To invite Arniel to WYD or Lourdes would mean understanding a whole host of factors over and above the price of the ticket. Arniel, like so many people in his situation, will never accept charity. It would mean overcoming this, and overcoming the fact that his time is limited between work, and looking out for his brother. And the often missed element is noticing that Arniel would not just need help to cover the cost of his ticket and accommodation, he would need help to buy a passport, suitcase, appropriate clothing and spending money.

So if not a popular youth pilgrimage to engage Arniel, then surely one of the new Catholic social networking sites would attract him? One such new site is reported to have invested over £1.5 million into a Catholic version of Facebook. But Arniel does not have access to the internet at home and even if he did, one would have to ask why he would want to live in a Catholic online ghetto anyhow. Surely it is another example of a lot of money being spent on 'quick fixes' in Catholic youth ministry. Would it not be better,

for those who will choose to use it, to remain on Facebook and develop a strong Christian presence as a witness to their online 'friends'?

Don't get me wrong, I have nothing against initiatives which attract socially included, engaged young people. I'm one of those and I want somewhere to belong. But, with so little resources, we simply have to make choices. Time and time again over the last eighteen months I have spoken to diocesan youth officers about developing new possibilities and almost without fail heard "I've got to focus on World Youth Day at present". That's great. If we commit to something, we should make it a success. But between WYD and Lourdes, between fundraising for one thing or another, between inviting young adults to social events in wine bars or academic talks about our faith, we are simply alienating a huge body of our young people. It seems that we don't know how to get them back because we are so out of touch, because the Church is increasingly more and more "professional" and, dare I say it, more and more appealing to the middle classes.

### **"The masses of today are the forgotten young people"**

A good friend of mine told me of a priest in a European city doing great work with young adults – all students and professionals. When asked about the young people from the working class, poor suburbs, the reply was simply "all lost". How sad. We need to argue that they are not all lost! In the YCW we have a duty to declare this in our role of representing these young people. YCW founder Fr Joseph Cardijn went to see Pope Pius XI in 1925 to seek approval for the YCW. The Pope, listening to his enthusiasm replied "Finally, someone comes to speak to me about the masses". The masses of today are the forgotten young people, especially 16-25 year olds, suffering isolation, lacking opportunity and many of them without enough money to have any chance of living the fullness of life which God wills for them.

Our approach is an approach which works across the globe and continues to work in the UK. Arniel only met the YCW a few months ago. He is beginning to recognise that he is indeed an expert in his own life. From his own nervous confidence-lacking beginnings he has now set a YCW group of similar young people from his locality. It has its ups and downs, but within it Arniel is growing in confidence and responsibility. He is enjoying being around other young people and, after these months, he is enjoying the opportunity to make a contribution. The group plan to raise awareness of the issues in their own community, which is in itself a crucial first step. Moreover, they will make a difference in their own lives and the lives of others. Perhaps the most significant thing for the Church is that Arniel and his group will be visible, engaged and active.

Not everyone needs the approach which we in the YCW are able to give to young people such as Arniel. There is of course a place for other things, including WYD. But they all need to be within a wider strategy for working with young people embracing the different charisms in the Church, the different approaches and the different passions. That may mean learning from the great work of the Jesuits in London reaching out to professional young adults, or the Live Simply initiative engendering a sense of global justice and solidarity. But we must also learn that there are significant numbers of young people, here at home, missing from our churches whom we are called to serve. They are not signing up to email listings and many do not think that what the Church does is relevant for them.

Let's discover ways to work together so that they can be engaged. This will then help all in the Church to act in solidarity and begin to transform situations of injustice. For when they see that they have a place in our communities we will have built a fair Church and we can turn to the world itself and say 'Get Fair'. Then, perhaps, we can travel together to the next WYD in Madrid, as a fair Church, travelling from an increasingly fair society.

# Until We Merrily Meet Again

*Memories of Albert Holt by Brian Coxhead*

**Albert was born in Hulme in 1925, growing up in the Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s.**

As a young man he sold papers before school and cakes after school to help support his family. On leaving school he gained an apprenticeship in the newspaper industry at Thompson House where he learned his trade as a photographic engraver. He spoke often of walking home through the Manchester Blitz, sheltering in churches as he believed them to be the safest places. In 1941 he came home to find his home in Trafford Park destroyed by a bomb. Fortunately his mother and sister were elsewhere when it happened.

In the early 1940s Fr Vincent Whelan invited Albert to join the committee of the youth club of English Martyrs, Moss Side. Thus began a friendship which was to last a lifetime. The youth club was very successful, with Father Whelan playing a great part in all its activities, acclaimed as one of the best in the city by Manchester Education Authority.

On 1 April 1943 Albert received his call-up papers. The paperwork looked so amateurish that he thought it was his mates playing an April Fool joke on him and ignored them. Two weeks later the Military Police came for him, and a week after that he was in the Royal Engineers. After D-Day he followed the British Army in the rush across Belgium and Holland after the German retreat. In Holland he was part of the force providing relief to the starving population where he forged lasting friendships with Dutch families in the Eindhoven area. At the end of the war

in Europe he was posted to India – shortly after India demanded independence!

Whilst in the forces Albert received letters from Fr Whelan telling him that he had started the Young Christian Workers movement in the parish. He felt that the Youth Club was not reaching out to the working youth in Moss Side who were losing contact with the Church. In 1944 Father Whelan wrote that “The YCW is slowly advancing in Moss Side as I grasp its purpose and See, Judge and Act method. We need 100% YCW leaders and the rest will follow.”

Albert was demobbed in 1947, returned to his job in the newspaper industry and rejoined the YCW. He took on more responsibility in the movement in Manchester and eventually become a National Organiser and later National President. He had the knack of getting people to do things without them realising that he had done it; he would commit them to tasks and causes that would cause them great embarrassment if they tried to get out of them. This became known as being “Alberted”. However it was always selfless and for a good cause and whilst often inconvenient at the time people felt good about what they had achieved.

In 1955 Albert left full-time YCW work, returned to his newspaper job and married May. He continued as a voluntary YCW Organiser in Salford Diocese and started his Family & Social Action in St Patrick’s parish. In 1957 Albert and May moved to the new parish of St Bernadette’s Bury, where Albert involved himself with parish activity. He was active in his Trade Union



and was for many years a shop steward. He was also a Justice of the Peace.

In 1957 Albert, Ted Taylor and others organised their first Christian Family Week at Dutton Manor. It began with five families – about 40 people in all. Over the years a successful formula was established. The key feature of the weeks is the daily Community Mass. Should it surprise us that an event is successful when the Mass is placed at the centre of things? Many people have benefited from these weeks over the last fifty years.

I don’t think that Albert ever forgot the early formation received from Fr Whelan. He cultivated a spiritual life which was the source of his enthusiasm. He had a rare ability to relate to people of all ages. He was 84 years young and never sat back on his laurels. He always looked forward. At the Memorial Mass for Fr Whelan in 1987 Albert said: “All he asks in his last request to us, is not to be sad at this temporary separation, but to remember him at the Altar of the Lord. And secondly he asks that we pray; that we may merrily meet again in Heaven.”

I cannot better these words of Albert and I think that is what he would ask of us. May he rest in peace.

## Jim Berry, RIP

by Joyce & Eugene Barrett

**An old stalwart of the YCW of the 1950s, Jim Berry, died on 18 June, aged 81.**

Jim began as a member of the group in Hebburn-on-Tyne, became a leader and progressed to being a National Organiser for about 3 years. He married in 1957.

From then on, while raising 5 children with his wife Sheila, he was a trade union leader, then or at the same time was a local councillor, later becoming a Magistrate. Surely his life of service to his community and devotion to his family was largely due to his lively faith and his training as a YCW.

Jim was one of the few original members of the original group in Hebburn. The others are Joyce and Eugene Barrett, Mary Carty and Bernie Barrett. We

all continue to support the YCW by our prayers, and some of us through subscriptions. They also are members of the Family & Social Apostolate, which was the adult YCW in our youth, who still meet up on a regular basis.

Jim’s death is a great loss to all his friends, family and parish, where he was also an active member of the SVP. We all pray for the YCW that all your efforts may have great success and that you go from strength to strength.



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