



Catholic Diocese of Sandhurst

Youth Ministry

Encounter to Intentional Discipleship

Mentoring young people: the art of accompaniment

Disclaimer

This paper is intended to promote reflection and dialogue about mentoring and the art of accompaniment, indicating the vision and direction for the movement from encounter with Jesus to intentional discipleship. Whilst it contains some detail and references to magisterial teaching and sacred scripture, it is not intended to be a comprehensive study of mentoring and the art of accompaniment for youth ministry.

Prepared by Dr Chris Cotter

Director Mission and Pastoral Life

Catholic Diocese of Sandhurst

© March 2026



Encounter to Intentional Discipleship

Mentoring young people: the art of accompaniment

Vision and Mission

“Go make disciples of all nations...and remember I am with you always until the end of the age” (Matthew 28: 19, 20)

“[Y]outh ministry involves two main courses of action. One is *outreach*, the way we attract new young people to an experience of the Lord **[encounter]**. The other is *growth*, the way we help those who have already had that experience to mature in it **[intentional discipleship]**” (CV 209)

Youth Ministry in Sandhurst

Sandhurst Youth Ministry (SYM) reaches out to young people (aged 16-35) in our communities, and in a special way to those in our parishes and schools, inviting them into a relationship with Jesus and offering intentional experiences to help them mature in their faith. SYM forms one part of a continuum of ministry with people and communities at every age and stage of life in our Diocese. For example, ministry with children, with married couples, with singles, with families, with the elderly. SYM embraces both youth-led and intergenerational approaches to the exercise of youth ministry.

Goals of Youth Ministry in the Diocese of Sandhurst:

- to foster the personal and spiritual growth of each person
- to draw young people into responsible participation in the life, mission and work of the Catholic faith community
- to empower young people to live as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today.

The Goals of Sandhurst Youth Ministry align with and serve the broader Strategic Mission and Pastoral Goals of the Diocese (2024-2028), launched by Bishop Shane Mackinlay in November 2024.

The best approach to realising the purpose and goals is a **partnership**, in the form of an agreement to actively collaborate in and exercise co-responsibility for the provision and leadership of Youth Ministry in Sandhurst. The partnership is between the Diocesan Chancery, Parishes, Priests and Catholic Education Sandhurst Ltd.



Many of our young people have had an encounter with Jesus through events and experiences such as the Australian Catholic Youth Festival in December 2025 and the World Youth Day pilgrimage in 2023. How do we move from these grace-filled encounters into intentional discipleship?

FROM ENCOUNTER TO INTENTIONAL DISCIPLESHIP: MENTORING and THE ART OF ACCOMPANIMENT

The journey from encounter, an experience of meeting the Lord, to intentional discipleship, being a follower of the Lord, is personal and complex. It is best undertaken in small groups with a leader or “mentor” (CV 246). This is called **accompaniment** of young people. The leaders who accompany young people know themselves to be **missionary disciples**.

For a model of accompaniment, we can look to the evangelising activity of Jesus. Jesus preached to hundreds, called the twelve, and **accompanied** three or four (Peter, James, John and Mary Magdalene) from an **encounter** with him into **intentional** (missionary) **discipleship** (Matthew 28:19). Jesus also walked with (accompanied) the two disciples who were downcast and discouraged on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35).

The “**art of accompaniment**” (EG 169) is a **personal** formative process of **growth** and facilitates the act of faith (leads people closer to God) and the internalisation of Christian virtues (2020 DC, 113c footnote).

Accompaniment “teaches us to remove our sandals before the **sacred ground of the other**. The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life” (EG 169). “One who accompanies others has to realise that **each person’s situation before God and their life in grace are mysteries** which no one can fully know from without” (EG 172).

The one who accompanies is steeped in the **art of listening**. “Listening helps us to find the right gesture and word which shows that we are more than simply bystanders. Only through such respectful and compassionate listening can we enter on the paths of true growth and awaken a yearning for the Christian ideal: the desire to respond fully to God’s love and to bring to fruition what he has sown in our lives” (EG 171).

Accompaniment requires **compassion, patience** and **trust**. Accompaniment sets **boundaries** and includes **accountability**, but always in the service of the mission of **sharing God’s love**.



Accompaniment will also include **Catechesis and the study of scripture**, and this is best delivered at the point of need, or when the disciple is ready or asks for it. Pope Francis (CV 212-213), warned mentors of the temptation to quickly teach the young person all the ‘correct doctrine’ of the Church. The Holy Father advised that the ever-deepening experience of God’s love must be primary, and all other evangelising activity follows from this.

Accompaniment also includes **praying** together and experiencing **different ways of prayer** until each disciple finds what is best for them personally.

Accompaniment includes events and large group experiences such as pilgrimages, gatherings and festivals; these can be moments of further encounter and encouragement, occasions of grace. Accompaniment will also include participation in “programs”, such as Alpha Youth, YCW or Marist “Game Changers”. The leader (or mentor) accompanies the young person in and through these experiences and programs and they may become moments of deeper commitment as a disciple.

What did young Catholics from around the world say to Pope Francis about the qualities of mentors?

[Y]oung people described to us the qualities they hope to find in a mentor, and they expressed this with much clarity. “The qualities of such a mentor include: being a faithful Christian who engages with the Church and the world; someone who constantly seeks holiness; someone who is a confidant without judging. Similarly, someone who actively listens to the needs of young people and responds in kind; someone deeply loving and self-aware; someone who recognises his or her limits and knows the joys and sorrows of the spiritual journey. An especially important quality in mentors is the acknowledgement of their own humanity – the fact that they are human beings who make mistakes: not perfect people but forgiven sinners. Sometimes mentors are put on a pedestal, and when they fall, it may have a devastating impact on young people’s ability to continue to engage with the Church. Mentors should not lead young people as passive followers, but walk alongside them, allowing them to be active participants in the journey. They should respect the freedom that comes with a young person’s process of discernment and equip them with tools to do so well. A mentor should believe wholeheartedly in a young person’s ability to participate in the life of the Church. A mentor should therefore nurture the seeds of faith in young people, without expecting to immediately see the fruits of the work of the Holy Spirit. This role is not and cannot be limited to priests and consecrated life, but the laity should also be empowered to take on such a role. All such mentors should benefit from being well-formed, and engage in ongoing formation” (CV 246).



PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Is mentoring for you?

Is accompaniment your gift and calling? Under 18's or Young Adults?

What is required?

- Mandatory safeguarding training
- Position description
- Formation and training
- Professional Supervision
- Spiritual Direction
- Life of prayer
- Belonging to a community of faith and acting under the authority of the person responsible for ministry in the community of faith (e.g., parish priest, school principal)
- Partnership with priests, parish, school, CESL Office, SYM
- Belonging to a ministry network (e.g., SYM)

Accompanying a small group includes:

- Encounter: focusing experience/event
- Going deeper: using the Examen (or a similar reflective process)
- Pattern of accompaniment: small group, prayer, location, listening
- Availability: scheduled meetings
- Resources and programs: e.g., local priests, SYM Network, Alpha Youth, Anointed and Sent (ACBC), YCW ("See-Judge-Act"), Marists ("Game Changers")
- Being connected, leveraging the partnership – this is not a ministry you undertake alone

Insights for leaders, for those who accompany young people:

- "Believe-in" the young person in front of you (CV 246)
- Listen humbly (EG 171)
- A "non-judgemental" stance is critical (CV 246)
- Be available – regular meetings and incidental moments, "walk alongside" young people (CV 246)
- Be human, be Christ-centred, be committed to your ongoing formation (CV 246)



References

(EG) Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation: The Joy of the Gospel (*Evangelii Gaudium*) 2013.

(CV) Pope Francis, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Christ is Alive! (*Christus Vivit*) 2019.

(DFC) Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation, *Directory For Catechesis*, 2020.

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, *Anointed and Sent: An Australian Vision for Youth Ministry*, 2009.

Further reading

Everitt Fritz, *The Art of Forming Young Disciples: why youth ministries aren't working and what to do about it?* Sophia Institute Press: Manchester NH, 2018.



This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

