

JESUS YOUTH

A Missionary Movement at the Service of the Church

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Jesus Youth is an international Catholic Youth Movement with a charismatic spirituality which originated in Kerala, the picturesque coastal state in the southernmost tip of India with its rich cultural backdrop and Christian tradition of three different Catholic rites and numerous other churches. In the 1970s the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) touched the lives of many, young and old and resulted in the formation of a number of youth groups. By the early 1980s, these groups had already matured into a vibrant presence. In 1985, the International Year of the Youth, these groups came together under a single name, Jesus Youth, seeking a clearer vision for themselves and for the wider participation of young people in the Church. From its small beginnings in Kerala, Jesus Youth gradually spread across the length and breadth of the country to have an active presence in all the states of India. Over the years the movement has spread to nearly twenty-five different countries around the world.

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1. Spirituality: Daily Life as a Disciple of Christ

The strength of the movement is its special focus on a life centred on the Lord Jesus Christ: beginning with an experience of God nourished by prayer, the Word of God, the Sacraments and fellowship and sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with others, especially the poor. More than a movement in its strict sense, Jesus Youth is a network of many creative initiatives, active small groups and dynamic individuals helping young people rediscover their Catholic faith in the context of today's world. Aware of the contemporary challenges facing the laity, Jesus Youth aims to promote an active Christian way of life. Members seek to grow as faithful disciples of Christ, through the six pillars of the Jesus Youth movement, which include regular reading, reflection and study of the Word of God, a commitment to a personal time of prayer and regular participation in the Eucharist and Sacrament of Reconciliation. Community fellowship, service to the oppressed and underprivileged and focus on evangelisation are other key elements of the Jesus Youth lifestyle, fostering a genuine growth and deepening of faith. The various Jesus Youth formation programmes, cells and small groups, prayer groups and personal guidance sessions also contribute to more faithful discipleship and growth in holiness.

2. Jesus Youth Ministries

With the vision of sharing the faith and building a witnessing community, various Jesus Youth ministries have evolved over the years. A Jesus Youth ministry often has its beginning as the initiative of an individual or a small fellowship, and normally tries to share Jesus in a particular context, using one's talent or charism. These initiatives then gradually grow into ministries of Jesus Youth. While helping young people to come together and grow in fellowship, these ministries also prepare youth to embrace the Gospel in their daily life and to proclaim that Gospel to others. Several ministries, initiatives, programmes, outreaches and approaches suiting youth of varied life situations, cultures and diverse backgrounds have evolved primarily from youth experimenting with various possibilities. While ministries like Campus Ministry, Parish Ministry, Professionals Ministry, Nurses Ministry and Teens Ministry cater to specific life situations, other reach-out initiatives in the form of Angels' Army (an initiative for children up to the age of 12), Outreach Ministry (involves visits to jails, hospitals, orphanages, slums, old age homes and among street children), Prolife Ministry (trains young people to take a stand against the culture of death) and talent oriented formation in the form

of Music Ministry, Audio-Visual Ministry, Media Ministry and Exhibition Ministry would speak of the diversity of charisms in operation.

Surprisingly creative and challenging initiatives emerge from the youth as they seek out new possibilities of reaching out to others. One such significant project – the Jesus Youth Fulltime Volunteers' Training – has been successfully going on for the past 19 years and has seen more than 1500 young participants undergo a one month intensive training and then take up a one-year commitment to work in mission areas in different parts of India. This year-long training for young people (preferably graduates) has two stages – a one month in-house session which trains them in the essentials of Catholic Evangelisation followed by placement in college campuses, youth groups and diocesan missions, with regular guidance and support. Many young people have also found their calling for priesthood/religious life through this one-year commitment period. In 2006, this project took off internationally and the first ever Jesus Youth International Fulltime Volunteers' Training was held in Sri Lanka with 24 participants from 9 different countries and it is continuing in Thailand every year after that. Both, the Trainings in India as well as the International Trainings, continue to be a regular feature each year and have been successfully motivating more and more young people to set aside a year for the Lord's work.

The search for new avenues for engaging youth with the Gospel message has led the movement to unique platforms. The Jesus Youth website www.jesuyouth.org, 'JOYnet' – the social networking platform of Jesus Youth, presence on various social networking sites, podcasts and numerous blogs testify to the strides in the e-world. The movement has witnessed initiatives in the areas of art, theatre and audio-visuals too. 'Rexband', the musical outreach of Jesus Youth, is a premier contemporary Christian band which has performed widely across India and in numerous countries around the world. Besides over 15 albums and more than 500 live concerts, Rexband strives to reach out to young people with the Good News through their concerts. It was the first band from India to be invited by the Holy Father to perform for the World Youth Day in 2002. Rexband has also performed in the following WYDs in 2005 at Cologne and in 2008 at Sydney.

3. Jesus Youth and the Church

As a lay movement of the Catholic Church, the process of being canonically recognised by the Church as an 'International Private

Association of Christian Faithful of Pontifical Right' officially began on 24th August 2009 with the Pontifical Council for the Laity. Jesus Youth is already a member of the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships – an international private association of members of the faithful having juridical personality in accordance with Canon 322 of the Code of Canon Law. Though Jesus Youth originated as a youth movement, through the years it is in the growth process of becoming a community in the Church. Family ministry, children's' ministry and other various above mentioned ministries are some of the milestones in this journey.

Jesus Youth is very much active in the life of the Church especially in parishes. Even prior to becoming officially approved by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) on 29th October 2008, Jesus Youth worked and lived as a leaven in the life of the parish communities. As living witnesses of Christ, members have been actively involved, witnessed and motivated the different organisations and bodies of the parishes with a Jesus Youth lifestyle. Often a Jesus Youth in the parish is recognised and understood through his/her Christ centred life style.

The administrative structure of Jesus Youth is simple in nature. A Jesus Youth group exists in different life contexts such as campus, parish, other institutions, work site, etc. The gatherings of cells or small groups are co-ordinated by a Core Team/Service Team. A Zonal Team is responsible in each zone for co-ordinating the Jesus Youth prayer groups, activities and ministries. A number of zones or a state constitutes a region and this is co-ordinated by a Regional Jesus Youth Team. The co-ordination at the National level is done by the National Team and the Jesus Youth International Team co-ordinates all these National Teams.

The selection of a Jesus Youth Team is the result of a process of discernment by a Discerning Community, guided by a Discernment Team. The whole process of the selection of leadership is done in a spirit of prayer and discernment and confidentiality to facilitate the work of the Holy Spirit and the building up of the Christian Community. As a Catholic movement, Jesus Youth and all its functions fall under the guidance of the local hierarchy and Jesus Youth in each locality is accountable to the local hierarchy of the Church.

4. Global Presence, Especially in Asia

Asia being the birth place of the Jesus Youth movement, its presence in the continent is undeniably active and significant, especially in India. From small beginnings in Kerala, over the years the Jesus Youth movement has been steadily growing in number. Most of the growth of the movement can be attributed to the immigration of Jesus Youth to countries outside India in view of their studies or jobs. Carrying with them a zeal to spread the Good News, these pioneering Jesus Youth helped sow the seed in different countries across the globe. In addition to India, the movement has a significant presence in Singapore, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Kuwait, Oman, UAE, Bahrain and Qatar in Asia. Besides this, the movement is active in different countries across the world like USA, UK, Ireland, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Australia and New Zealand.

5. Jesus Youth Jubilee 2010

The year 2010 marks another milestone for Jesus Youth as it is the movement's silver Jubilee Year. It is a time for all in the movement to reflect, introspect and give thanks to the Lord for His immense mercy and love over the years. Initiatives for spiritual deepening, intercession and for encouraging missionary commitments among Jesus Youth worldwide are some of the focuses of this year. 'Outreach - Child Support', a key Jubilee initiative aims at providing at least 2500 needy children from South East Asian countries with financial aid and accompanying them in their journey of education. A mega Jubilee Conference scheduled for December 2010 will bring together nearly 15,000 Jesus Youth from across the world at Kochi, Kerala.

'A missionary movement at the service of the Church' – the Jesus Youth tagline – rightly captures the essence of the movement. The movement continues to encourage and inspire each member to do everything possible to make Christ relevant in their life situations and circumstances. Passionately Catholic, joyfully charismatic, uncompromisingly missionary and surprisingly contemporary – this defines Jesus Youth!