

**TOUCHING
THE
SACRED**

**A REPORT PRODUCED BY THE
AUSTRALIAN YOUNG CHRISTIAN WORKERS
2006**

AYCW SPIRITUALITY INQUIRY

As part of its national plan of action in 2005, the Australian YCW developed a Spirituality Inquiry. From our own experiences and from contact with young people around the country, it has been clear that a deep hunger and sense of searching characterise the lives of many young people today. In response to this awareness, an inquiry was developed along the traditional Cardijn method of 'see, judge, act'.

The aim of the inquiry was threefold:

1. To provide an opportunity for young people to reflect on their own spirituality;
2. To enable the YCW to reflect on the insights of these young people, so that, as a movement, we can better respond to their needs;
3. To provide background information for the Church and for youth workers within dioceses.

It is hoped that the initial findings will assist in the Church's mission to young people. The YCW will use the results in our own movement, and initiate a number of programs in response to the needs that have been articulated.

SPIRITUALITY REVIEW

Initial Findings

A. Approximately 500 surveys have been summarised. These have been widely diverse, and both inspiring and challenging in their content. All respondents appeared to take the exercise seriously. Most respondents were YCW affiliated, but some (mainly senior school students) did not have formal connections with the Movement.

There was significant diversity in the responses, particularly in the section related to the definition of spirituality.

1. WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY TO YOU?

Responses in this section fell into two significant areas, both connected with a sense of the sacred. Some saw them as interrelated but the majority focussed on one aspect or the other:

1. Spirituality conceived of as **beyond** – ‘a sense of the sacred beyond me – the Spirit greater than I am, which transcends me, and is the life behind all things’ – beyond matter, beyond the individual, connected to a ‘spiritual world’.
2. Spirituality conceived as **the essence within** – embodied in the whole of life – ‘the life source, the essence of who I am, the passion or flame deep inside’ – the energy and dynamism that underpins every aspect of life, an increased awareness about life, a sensitivity to what gives it its deepest meaning.

SOME COMMENTS.

1. Spirituality conceived of as BEYOND

- My life source – God directing me, growing me guarding me, supporting me, empowering me and relating to me
- A belief that there is a spirit greater than me
- The life source beyond all things
- Something that helps connect with something deep, gives a meaning and purpose, an answer to life
- Something that guides me
- invisible
- Something to believe in
- Someone more powerful
- Inner being to confide in
- Being in touch with God and everything around
- Something special, relationship with something higher than ourselves
- Religion
- Inspires you to do something, something we live for, important part of life
- Link to God and always I feel closer to my God
- Deeper connection with self and God and discover who you really are
- Faith and beliefs

- Transcends material essence and needs
- Something divine and pure and far beyond imagination
- Abstract element
- Feeling empowered and connected with God, relationship with God
- Connections to supreme being
- Something more than humanity, transcends feelings thoughts from heart and mind, feel more in touch with self and nature
- Unseen goodness
- God, Jesus, Holy people
- Meditation and prayer
- Connects with Inner being **and** greater things in life
- Transcends material essence and needs
- Silence goes only so far, and then there's God
- Something more than humanity, transcends feelings thoughts from heart and mind, feel more in touch with self and nature

2 Spirituality conceived of as WITHIN

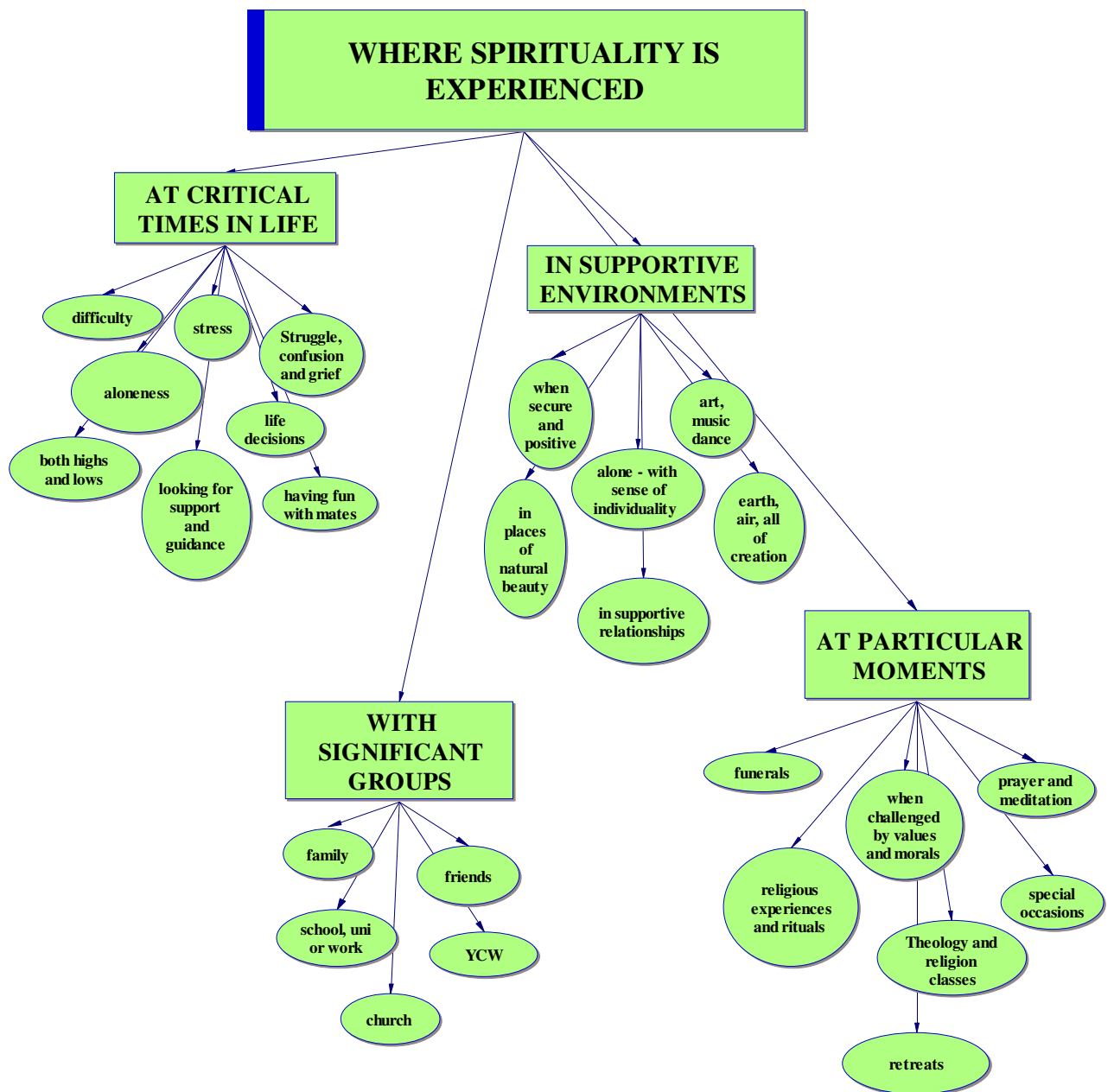
- A passion or flame deep inside
- The essence of who I am
- Something that gives a meaning and purpose, an answer to life
- Awareness of inner self and day to day connections to everything around me, greater understanding
- Inner strength and intimate peace, without a world
- something we live for, important part of life
- Practice of beliefs in personal way
- Enlightening, sharing and caring
- Beliefs and morals and ethics, respect strongly
- Inner thoughts, spirit, emotional harmony
- Freedom and how we look at life
- An inner self surrender, spiritual, emotional connection
- Place and time alone to reflect on the events of the day
- Interrelationship with land ancestral beings and Aboriginal life
- Belief in the spirit of life
- Guide on how to live my life, major influence on how I see others and life situations
- Happiness in the person you are
- Brings peace, calmness, happiness and fulfillment
- Inner being and greater things in life
- My spirit and the spirit are one
- Deeper connection with self and God to discover who you really are
- Belief in and in touch with self, in mind and heart, deep. You live it.

There were a few responses that did not see any necessity for spirituality, and which regarded the review as meaningless. Two saw it as spiritualism – verging on the occult:

- Don't need it
- I don't believe in any spirituality
- Getting in touch with the spirit world, séances

2. IN WHAT AREAS OF YOUR LIFE DO YOU EXPERIENCE THIS SPIRITUALITY AND WHERE AND WHEN IS IT AT ITS STRONGEST?

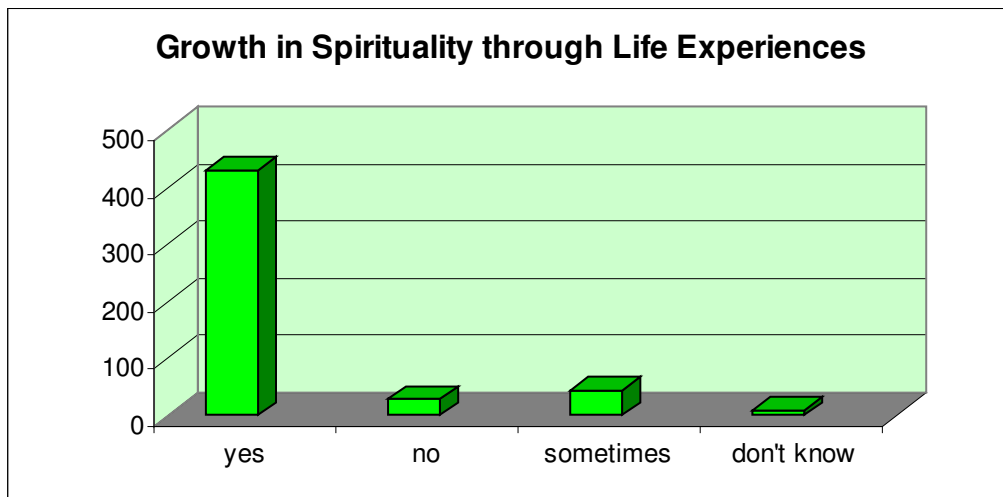
A number of themes emerged in these responses. These are summarised in the following diagram.



3. DO YOU FEEL YOUR SPIRITUALITY IS GROWING THROUGH YOUR OWN LIFE EXPERIENCES?

The answer to this question was overwhelmingly positive, although there were some honest and thoughtful responses about the challenges of spiritual growth in the midst of contemporary life.

The breakdown of the responses so far collated are as follows:



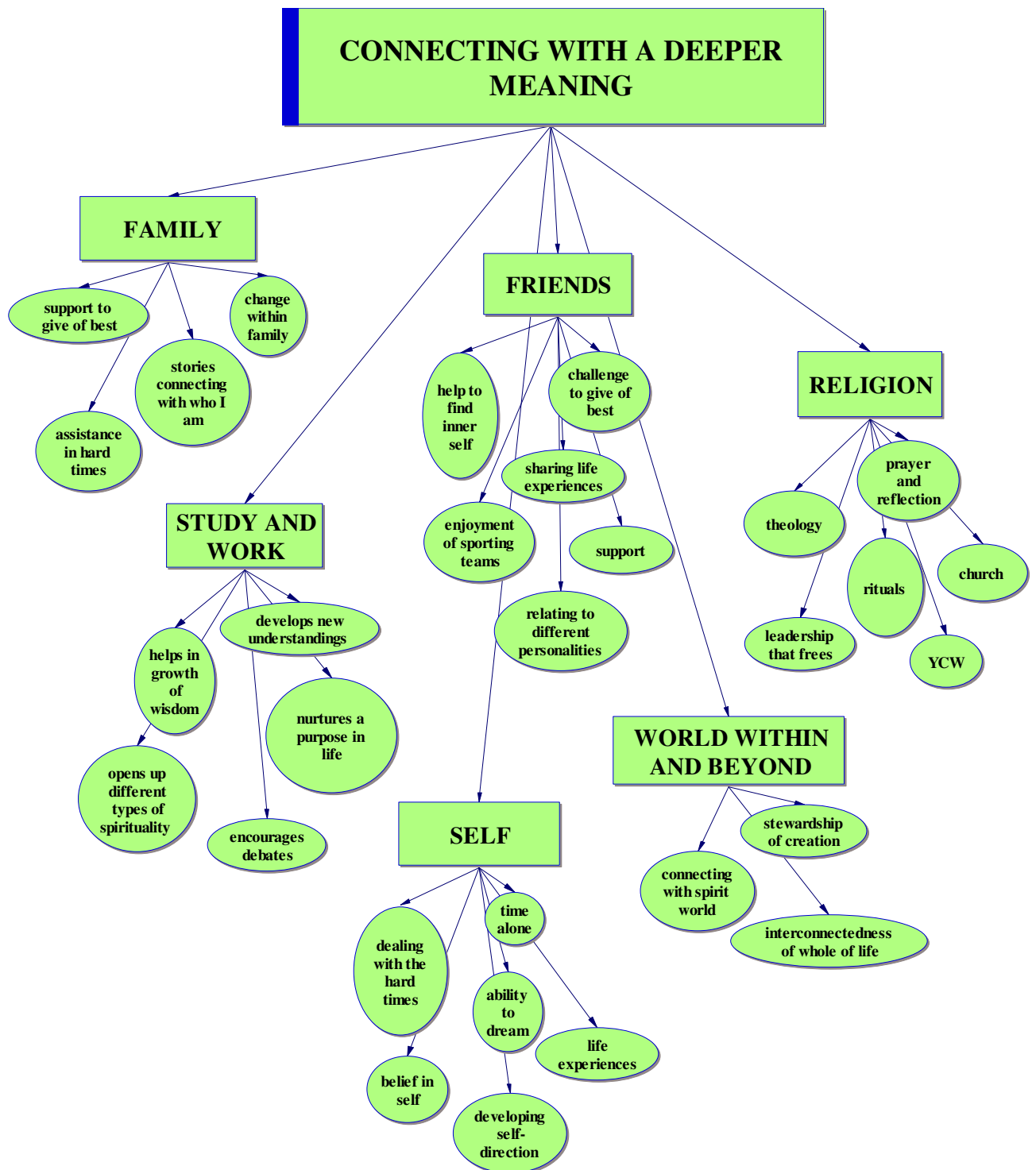
SOME COMMENTS

- It grows through the everyday
- Through age
- As I learn and understand more about myself
- Neither growing or diminishing
- Sometimes – in other ways I feel I am becoming de-sensitised
- As we get older, we seem to lose connection with it, because we become more preoccupied with other things
- Your life experience allows you/gives you the capability to grow
- Events, relationship and what I see, hear and do
- I feel a stronger need to express my identity (my spirituality with others)
- Through sports teams and lasting friendships
- It is diminishing as I see more and more things
- I feel as though my life is moving too fast and my spirituality cant keep up

4. WHAT ELEMENTS OF YOUR LIFE DOES YOUR SPIRITUALITY HELP YOU CONNECT WITH THE DEEPER MEANING WITHIN YOUR LIFE? HOW?

There were clear correlations in the responses to questions 2, 4 and 5, which then lead naturally into the response to question 6. Six areas were identified.

The following diagram summarises the responses to this question:



5. WHAT CAN HELP DEEPEN YOUR OWN SPIRITUALITY – HELP YOUR OWN SPIRITUALITY TO GROW?

Responses to this question were shorter than others. They covered the areas of personal and relational opportunities. Some reflected also on the importance of outreach and work for justice.

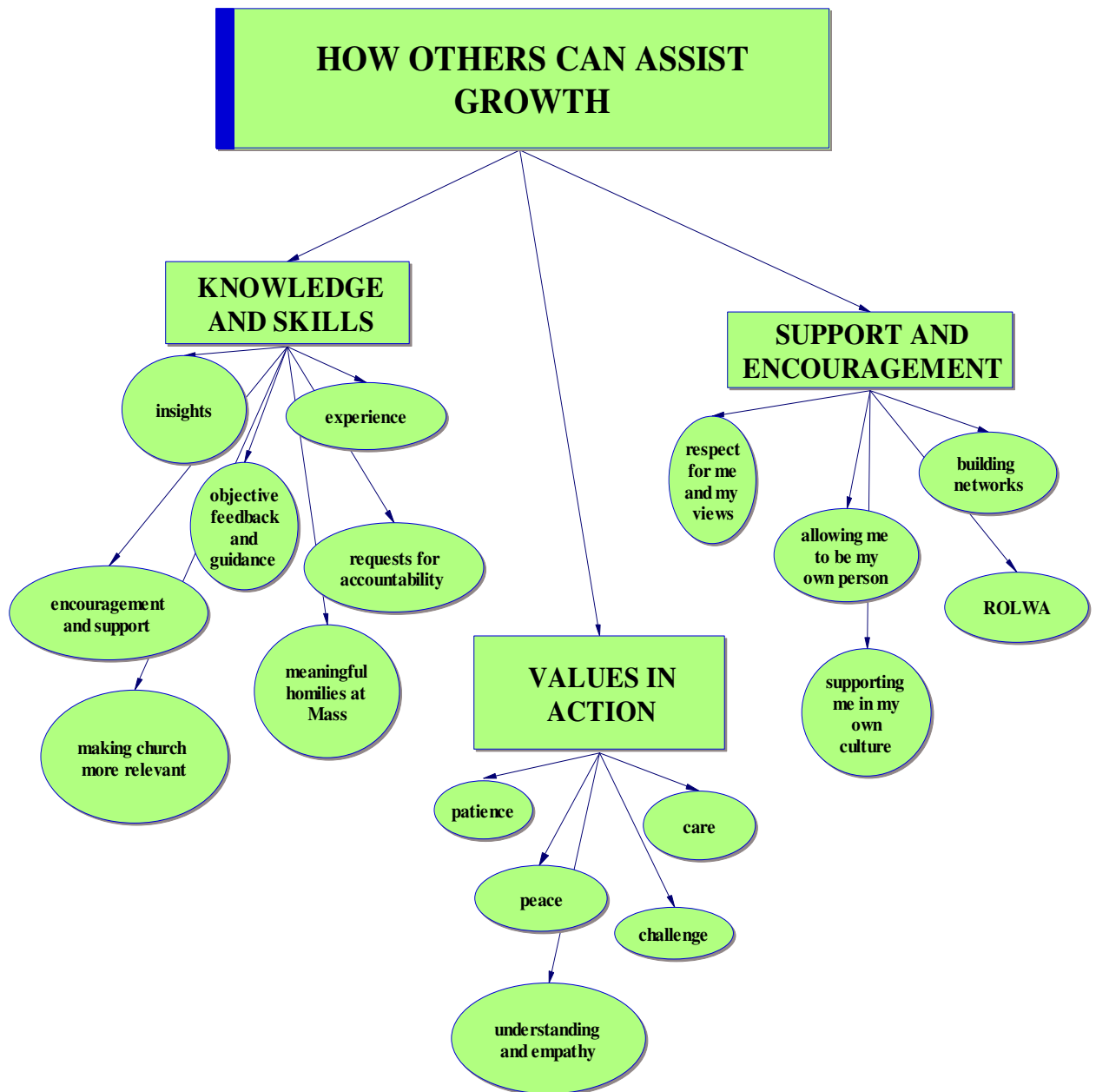
The following diagram summarises these.



6. WHAT CAN OTHERS DO TO HELP MAKE THIS HAPPEN?

Answers to this question were brief but thoughtful. As with earlier questions, a clear correlation with other responses emerged. A number of people however, indicated they did not know how others could assist them in this area of their lives.

For those who did respond, three main areas were identified. The following diagram summarises these:



SUMMARY

A. What Was Said

In one sense the review revealed expectable outcomes:

1. Most young people surveyed indicated a real and positive interest in spirituality;
2. Our spirituality is influenced most significantly by family and friends, but also by other contacts: work, study, church and by the beauty we find in the world around us;
3. We deepen our own spirituality through self reflection and ongoing review of our relationships- within self, with others and with the earth;
4. Others nurture our spirituality through their affirmation and acceptance of us, and through challenges which call us to new possibilities.

B. How We Are Challenged

The spirituality review throws up some very real challenges:

1. We are called to nurture the growing interest in spirituality in ways that lead young people to appreciate and deal with the complexity of life rather than offering simplistic black and white solutions which inevitably fail in times of deep difficulty and crisis;
2. The nexus between spirituality and religion needs to be strengthened before this generation is lost to church within the challenges of life in the 21st century;
3. The conversation between spirituality and religion could become polarized. We are called to explore the experiences of both, so that one can enrich the other;
4. The spirituality of the YCW provides a sound theological base for ongoing discussion and exploration of this area. We are called develop young leaders through this process.

C. What We Will Do

The YCW will run workshops/seminars/round tables in the following areas:

1. Spirituality and the challenges to life and church in the 21st century;
2. Young people and the Gospel call to servant leadership;
3. Connecting the spirituality of the YCW and the spirituality of mission.

It is our hope in response to requests from a number of Bishops that these workshops can inform and support the programs being developed for World Youth Day, to be held in Sydney 2008.

There was a strong sense among many young people that risk-taking is central for living mission today- a real consciousness that life is precious and that for our one life to have meaning for ourselves and our world, our commitment and being prepared to be counted is essential.

Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great.