



ICYCW Declaration of Principles

International Coordination of the Young Christian Workers

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Introduction

The International Co-ordination of Young Christian Worker Movements (ICYCW) presents this Declaration as an explanation of the vision and basic principles of the YCW Movement and a guide to its authentic character.

These principles are intended to be a focus of unity and strength for each National Movement and for the ICYCW throughout the world.

It is the hope of the ICYCW that the National Movements which it co-ordinates will be inspired by this vision of the Movement and put it into practice whilst keeping their own autonomy and identity.

Part One: The Foundations of the Movement

The Original Vision

“An organisation of young workers with a view to the conquest of their eternal and temporal destiny” (J. Cardijn)

1. The Young Christian Worker Movement (YCW) was born in Belgium in 1925. It is founded on the insight, faith and initiative of a young Catholic priest, Fr. Joseph Cardijn and a group of young working people.

2. At the origin and heart of the YCW is a wonderful truth clearly and frequently proclaimed by its founder. It is the truth of faith: that young workers are created in the image of God and have a God given dignity and an eternal destiny. Next to this is the sober truth of reality: most young people are not aware of this great dignity and find it hard to discover because of the conditions and values which surround them.

3. The YCW was founded as a response to this contradiction. Its mission is:

- to be a real sign of God’s loving presence amongst young people of the “popular milieu” (see para. 4)
- to free young people from all situations which contradict and offend their dignity and destiny as sons and daughters of God and help them discover their own irreplaceable personal vocation.
- to be a living witness to young people of God’s life-giving action and plan in Jesus Christ.
- to proclaim the Good News of the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God.
- to propose faith in Jesus Christ and live by it.

A Movement by Young People for Young People

“The working class character of the YCW is expressed in the fact that it deals with, and wishes to solve, the workers’ problem” (J. Cardijn)

4. The Y.C.W. Movement was founded to carry out a special mission amongst young men and women of working class culture. This means that the YCW has a preferential option for the kind of young people who are not highly advantaged financially or educationally, for those who live in the less well to do areas and find it hard to make their voice heard. It is for young workers of city and

countryside, apprentices, those on vocational training courses, those with insecure jobs and the unemployed.

It also includes the kind of young people who would like to make a commitment to this option and to the mission that the YCW offers..

Note: when the term “young people” is used in this document it is meant in the sense just described.

5. The YCW is concerned about the life of young people of this background and culture in all its aspects of family, work, education, leisure and culture.

The Main Purpose of the Movement

“We need an organisation of young working lads and girls which takes them out of their isolation, their abandonment, their powerlessness, which groups them, trains them, helps them and represents them in order to teach them and enable them to re-christianise their whole lives, their entire environment, the whole mass of young workers, in conformity with their divine vocation and the divine plan” (J. Cardijn)

6. The main purpose of the YCW is to proclaim to young people that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit is decisive for their true happiness and freedom.

7. This proclamation necessarily involves the YCW in action to strengthen the hope and secure the freedom of young people who suffer personally and collectively from all kinds of alienation, oppression and exploitation.

8. This freedom means that young people are able to experience an adequate quality of life and that they can set out on the path to discover the deeper meaning of their life. It allows them to have hope for the future and to embrace values that can truly bring them fulfilment.

9. In this work of liberation the YCW sees itself in solidarity with all men and women who struggle and suffer with the same hopes, dreams and purpose.

10. The YCW sees itself as part of the long struggle for freedom in the world. It shares the vision of the worker movement in its stand for equality, solidarity, justice and peace.

It is committed to making sure that the basic conditions needed for true human fulfilment are possible for all young people.

11. The YCW seeks to enable young people to be active collaborators with God in the work of building the new world of His Kingdom of which the Church is a visible sign. The YCW offers a faith experience of Church gradually gained through discovery of Jesus Christ, reflection in a small group on the Word of God, lived Christian experience and meaningful celebration of the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

The Specific Task of the YCW

“Give me leaders and I will raise the world” (J. Cardijn)

12. The particular way in which the YCW works to fulfil its main purpose is to call young people and train them to be *leaders* in their daily lives and amongst others, militants and apostles for the sake of the Kingdom.

13. A young person who freely and whole-heartedly chooses and commits themselves to the YCW service of other young people is called a militant.

A leader/militant is called to be:

- critically aware of the real situations, in which he/she and other young people live and work, and perceives where change is needed;
- conscious of the values of God's kingdom, knows Jesus Christ as friend and brother and trusts in the support and guidance of the Holy Spirit;
- actively creative, with others, in being a leader in daily life and enabling others to have an experience of the YCW movement.

14. Some of them are called to be leaders at the service of the Movement. This service is to help members to become aware of their dignity and to live out the true meaning of their lives and so enable others to become leaders or militants.

15. To form young people as leaders the YCW engages them in a gradual ongoing program of reflection and action. Through this process a young person becomes more critically aware and more sensitive to the link between faith and life. The YCW program helps a young leader to have a greater sense of responsibility and to be more able to plan and take action. This leads to the transformation of both those involved and reality itself.

16. The YCW is a school for life. Its programme of formation seeks to integrate the human and spiritual aspects of a young person's life. It takes into account and brings together personal and psychological, social and political, ethical and religious issues.

17. The YCW has the specific intention of guiding young people on a formative journey on which they are brought out of isolation, helped to reflect more deeply on life and faith, and prepared for responsible involvement in today's world.

Part Two: the YCW Method of Formation

The specific method of the YCW is essential for achieving its purpose and making effective its responsibility for evangelisation described in "The Foundations of the Movement".

A Personal Vocation.

"There is something particular about the vocation of the YCW leader. God calls us to give ourselves to a specific mission, perhaps the most important of our time, to save the working class and working class youth" (J. Cardijn)

18. The YCW method of formation starts from the firm belief that each young person has a unique vocation, a personal mission to fulfil.

19. This personal mission is carried out primarily in the ordinary acts of everyday life and is irreplaceable.

20. A significant step in the discovery of this mission is the personal call and invitation to a young person to participate in the action, events and meetings of the Movement.

The Review of Life (RoL)

Background

“A practical school, a school of training, in which they learn to see, to judge and to achieve the apostolic value of their whole life, in all its aspects, its details, the most humble and daily ones” (J. Cardijn)

21. Joseph Cardijn, the founder of the YCW, created and developed an original method so that the Movement could fulfil its role in offering young people a way to transform their lives.

This method is the Review of Life (or the SEE, JUDGE, ACT Method).

It has its source in the truths underlying the YCW. These are: that each young person is created in the image of God and is precious in the eyes of God; that the reality of young peoples’ lives does not always reflect this; that young people themselves can act to change their situation.

22. The Review of Life is a method of transformation.

It is a means by which young people can grow and develop in themselves as well as influencing and changing the situations around them.

It is a way of training militants for the kingdom of God who are able to lead other young people by example and by involving them in their action.

As a Christian process, it is an effective instrument in the making of young apostles in today’s world who will be able to see the signs of the Spirit of Jesus Christ at work and to give witness to their faith in everyday life among their friends and companions.

The Review of Life demands a lot of a young person. It challenges them to become less self-oriented, to progress from “being in the YCW for themselves” to “being in the YCW for themselves and their friends and for the sake of their fellow workers near and far.”

23. The Review of Life gives an authentic experience of Church to young people. It provides a new way for them to have a Christian community as a reference point in their lives and an opportunity for them to be actively involved.

24. In following this method a young person is in solidarity with the collective experience of many worker leaders past and present whose faith and commitment grew through the Review of Life.

25. The Review of Life begins in the context of a small group meeting as a method of shared reflection and extends into everyday life as a means of encouraging action. It consists in seeking a clearer understanding of life situations and of considering the implications of faith. It involves decision on the right thing to do and review of action taken.

For the YCW the Review of life is a way of life and not just a technique or a strategy to reach an objective.

26. The Method has three simple but profound steps SEE – JUDGE – ACT.

27. SEE

The first step in the YCW method is a close attention to the life of the young person, a clear, specific look at the actual concrete events experienced day to day by a young person. These events make up the situations in which they live and which characterise their lives.

The YCW does not start from the general problem of young people or from theory about young people.

In this stage we share, as young people, actual experiences which are specific, factual, recent and personal to us and to our companions or fellow workers. This stage in which we are open to the reality of life is rooted in the belief that the life of every young person has value and that God, through His Spirit is at work in their life. We help one another to explore the details and meaning of these events to gain a greater understanding.

We also examine the causes, distant and immediate, of what has happened. We note and try to understand the effects on themselves and on others.

This step keeps the YCW rooted in the real lives of young people today, because the starting point of the YCW is young people themselves. The current experiences, concerns, struggles and expectations of young people will always be our primary focus of attention.

28. JUDGE

In this second step we compare what is being done and what has happened to what should be done and what should have happened. We discuss the rights and wrongs relevant to the experiences we have exchanged in the first step. It is a time for sharing and recognizing our beliefs and convictions. We open the scriptures and try to establish a point of meeting between the Word of God (especially in the Gospel narratives) and our own experiences in order to discover how the teaching and example of Jesus inspires, guides and challenges us today.

This step gives the YCW a source of light and inspiration, of truth and strength. It enables us to give meaning to our experiences and purpose to our actions, helping us to evaluate our way of life, the situations around us and the changes that are needed. It is a means through which our awareness of who we are is moulded and challenged. It is an opportunity to recognize and accept the presence and action of God in our lives and in that of our friends. It is a moment that links us to the witness of the first believers, prompts us to express our own word of faith and leads us to prayer and celebration. This step enables us to discover the Good News of Christ and to deepen it.

29. ACT

In this third step we discuss and decide upon definite actions that we could take either individually or together as a result of our See and Judge. We look for ways we can commit ourselves to the struggle to live with dignity in the light of the Gospel and to enable and encourage other young people to do the same. We search together to find ways of overcoming the difficulties that face us and of answering the questions that have arisen. We help one another to understand why we are taking action and how effective a sign it is of God's love.

This step gives the YCW a powerful means of formation: action. It means a YCW group is more than a discussion group, a think tank or a gospel reflection group. The group does discuss, think and reflect on the Gospel but it also acts and in acting young people learn and develop their potential. Each action however small and seemingly insignificant is the seed of future understanding and commitment.

Review of action

To complete the action stage we review the action taken. We describe the actions we have taken and take note of what has been achieved what the difficulties were and what still needs to be done. We help one another to evaluate the purpose and effects of the action taken. We encourage one another to persevere in adversity. We focus on the influence we are able to have on others. We try to see the signs of the Kingdom present in our actions and to recognize Jesus Christ alive today.

This completes the cycle of the YCW method and can become the source of a further SEE. It is an opportunity for us to give true value to what has been attempted and achieved. It is a time for us to evaluate the personal transformations brought about through action, discover our abilities and realise that we have a real role to play in society. If action is not reviewed it will often lose its significance and its force as a point of growth. It is a way of building solidarity with others in the Movement

The YCW Leaders Group

“Nevertheless, if the YCW is a mass organisation, it is equally and essentially an organisation with an elite, a school of leaders, militants, apostles” (J. Cardijn)

30. In a broad sense the YCW is made up of all the young people involved in the action, enquiries and events of the Movement. There are young people in regular contact with the Movement through individual personal meetings, young people who are in a group organised by the Movement for a particular purpose (eg. social, educational or sporting activity) and young people who have begun to meet together to follow the spirit and ideals of the YCW.

31. The true heart and core of the YCW is in its groups of *leaders* or militants. YCW leaders meet together regularly in a small group of around 5 – 8 young people. It is a group of young people who commit themselves to the mission of the YCW and to following together the formative journey of the Movement. Young people in a leaders’ group commit themselves to:

- meeting regularly for the Review of life.
- being involved in their work place or neighbourhood.
- supporting the Movement financially and learning to live out this financial commitment in generosity and solidarity
- spreading the spirit and ideals of the YCW among other young people of the popular milieu.

32. This small group responds to the needs of the young people around them (at work, at school, in the neighbourhood).

33. The leaders’ group try to make the Review of Life a way of life. Alongside their personal development as YCW leaders the members of the group learn the value of community dialogue and acceptance of one other. They grow in a sense of solidarity and in friendship and cultivate little by little a way of life rooted in the gospel and social commitment. They develop the skill of planning and working together.

34. The leaders’ group gives joyful witness to the spirit of happiness (cf. the Beatitudes) that is given to those who struggle for justice, work for peace and commit themselves totally for the Lord’s sake.

Part Three: The Characteristics of the YCW

“We must understand that it is the whole YCW and nothing but the whole YCW which will enable us, by the aid of Divine grace and under God’s providence, to achieve the only true purpose of the YCW... the giving of this spiritual life to the masses and to working youth, by constantly showing them the meaning of their life on earth... the life of a child of God” (J. Cardijn)

35. The combination of the three characteristics of “young”, “Christian”, “worker” here outlined give the YCW Movement its specific character and originality within the Church and society.

Young

“The first and immediate apostle to young workers is another young worker” (J. Cardijn)

36. The YCW is a Movement in which young people take responsibility for themselves. It is organised:

Among them – the YCW seeks to be present wherever young people meet, live and work. It groups together young people who are representative of their peers.

By them – the YCW is run and organised by young people themselves and encourages them to take responsibility in their own lives.

For them – the YCW helps young people to have a sense of responsibility towards other young people.

37. The YCW is for the Mass of young people. In its actions, proposals and responsibility for evangelisation, it tries to reach the greatest possible number of young people. It seeks to encourage young people, whilst respecting their differences, to become active within their own environment and in the world and to be apostles.

38. Through the YCW Movement young people can experience a sense of belonging and of sharing their life with others. They are encouraged to take decisions among themselves to help each other and others. They discover a community dimension to their lives. They realise that they can play an active part in relation to the people and events that influence their lives. They recognize their responsibility in what happens to them and to other young people.

39. To safeguard the “young” characteristic of the Movement each National Movement should define an age limit and build up links with a corresponding adult Movement or other adult apostolates. These links will enable older YCW members to continue in their formation as Christian leaders.

Supported and accompanied by adults

“The work of the chaplain in the Movement is not to organize nor to lead, but to sustain, form, help, and give the leaders the teaching and the grace of Our Lord” (J. Cardijn)

40. The YCW sees as all-important the involvement of committed adults in its programme of formation. These are priests, deacons, religious brothers and sisters, lay men and women who act as chaplains, animators and educators in the Movement. It is their task to help young people discover the Movement and to accompany them in living out the authentic characteristics of the Movement.

41. The chaplains and animators of the Movement give witness to a dedicated collaborative spirit of service to young people. They represent the rich diversity of the apostolate in the world of work..

Worker

“In order that the YCW should have a working-class character it must be and it must build a workers’ movement” (J. Cardijn)

42. The YCW was born out of the hope given to young workers by the truth that, despite exhausting working conditions, unbearable weariness and social humiliation, they had a dignity and worth which together they could still live by and a potential which by acting together they could begin to realize

43. These alienating and oppressive conditions for young people still exist today all over the world. They are present in the clear physical realities of bad working and living conditions. They also appear in more subtle forms such as consumerism, family breakdown, stress and addictions. The YCW faces these realities and stands as a sign of hope and freedom.

44. The YCW has a special place within the Church's pastoral concern for the world of work and especially in regard to young people employed or unemployed. It gives a voice to the voiceless, represents young people directly and stands up for their just rights and human dignity.

45. The YCW gives young people a formation that enables and encourages them to be involved in an adult Christian apostolate especially in the world of work. It promotes and supports the ideal that active witness to Christian values is needed in the work place, in trade unions, political parties, and all areas of civic life. The YCW provides a training which enables and encourages young people to make a commitment alongside other men and women who actively take part in building a better world through their organisations, associations, parties and trade unions. It wishes to make them be aware of the links which exist between those who struggle for a better world. It invites and encourages young people to respond to this calling.

46. Each National Movement must discern for itself the most suitable adult movements or associations to recommend to members who are too old to be in the YCW.

Christian

“This divine, supernatural destiny and vocation must put the young workers in continuous contact with God, so that their life becomes a divine life, in constant union with Christ, so that their own life becomes the life of Christ in them” (J. Cardijn)

47. The YCW is concerned for all young people. It reaches out to them without discrimination in the spirit of the universal love of God for all humanity.

48. The YCW rejoices in the truth of faith that all young people are created in the image and likeness of God. The YCW celebrates the fact that God became man and lived as a young carpenter in Nazareth establishing solidarity with all young working people.

49. The YCW proclaims the good news that Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead to bring freedom and hope to young people. It offers young people the opportunity to get to know Jesus Christ as friend, brother and saviour of the poor. The YCW wants young people to find in the Risen Lord a new life stronger than death and to experience His living presence among us today.

50. The YCW experiences the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit in its discernment of God's Word and its actions of service to young people.

51. The YCW proposes a journey of faith in Christ to young people. This journey is one on which they are helped to seek answers to the fundamental questions of life such as: What is the purpose of my life? What is the meaning of life and death? What sense can be made of the struggles and sufferings of young people?

52. Each member of the YCW is called to live out their experience of faith in the small militant group, to share and celebrate it within the Movement and to give witness in the world by an option for solidarity with the weak, the humble and the poor.

53. The YCW is a Movement of the Church. It sees itself as a bridge builder between young people of the world of work and the Church which can often appear distant and hostile to this reality. The YCW seeks to give young people an experience of Church rooted in their everyday reality.

54. The YCW looks to the universal community of the Catholic Church guided by the Pope and Bishops to protect and uphold the richness and dignity of young people. From this wider ecclesial reality it receives acceptance and acknowledgement of its specific mission.

55. In some countries YCW members are from other religions or are non-believers. Here the Movement (without losing its ecclesial identity) seeks to lead them to discover, deepen and live a life of faith through the richness of their own religious traditions. It seeks to keep an open ecumenical attitude of dialogue and discussion rooted in the common desire for the liberation of the poor.

Movement

“Sitting down is not a movement; a movement must move. A movement is a group of people who are in motion, on the move, with an impetus, dynamic, who are going somewhere, who want to get something” (J. Cardijn)

56. The YCW is not just a collection of isolated groups. It is a Movement organised on the basis of equality. In it the organisation is not just something functional but an experience of solidarity and community lived out in an organised way. In the countries where it is present, the YCW is a Movement which links the groups together through the reality experienced by young people, through action and formation. To do this effectively, the YCW organises campaigns, rallies and festivals, training programmes and retreats. Furthermore, regional, national and international events enable young people to experience solidarity among themselves and between national movements.

57. From within the personal events and encounters of a young person’s life begins the discovery of wider issues at local, national and international level. This provides the basis for a deeper understanding of the personal and structural dimension of his\her life. This combination helps to prevent a young person or a group becoming too inward looking.

Autonomous

“Directed by young workers, spread by them, built up, achieved, paid for by them. Its organization, its teaching, its direction, its services, must be fully theirs” (J. Cardijn)

58. Each national Movement belonging to the ICYCW is self governing and autonomous.

59. The ICYCW has its own autonomy and individuality in the following respects:

- It aims to be self-financing through the contributions of national movements and not to have any financial ties that compromise its freedom.
- It does not have allegiance to any specific political party or trade union organization.

International Coordination

“We must decide now to build a YCW which is apostolic and missionary, not only in our own country but also in Europe, Asia, America, Africa, the world” (J. Cardijn)

60. The life of every young person has an international dimension. The world is more and more inter-dependent. Young people are more and more linked through the culture of the mass media. The causes of many difficult situations are international and decisions in one country often have world wide consequences. All over the world young people find common joys and sorrows, hopes and struggles and whereas young people in poor countries suffer in an enormously more dramatic way, the same conditions are present everywhere to some extent.

61. The YCW also has an international dimension. The organisation of this international dimension was made official during an historic pilgrimage and rally of YCW members in Rome in 1957. After a turbulent period, especially following the death of Joseph Cardijn in 1967, the YCW, in several National movements and in its international structure, experienced difficulties on many levels including political and ecclesial. As a consequence the movement was weakened in many countries. In 1986 after more than 10 years of trying to redress the situation, some national movements belonging to the International YCW decided to create the ICYCW (International Coordination of Young Christian Workers): an international co-ordination which would be at the service of the National Movements all over the world.

The main objective of the co-ordination is to help existing movements to grow and develop by remaining faithful to the fundamental objectives of the YCW and its founder. Furthermore, the ICYCW seeks to promote the YCW in countries where it is not present and offers help and support to new Movements. The Coordination pays particular attention to the specificity and autonomy of each national movement.

The ICYCW is recognised by the Holy See as an International Catholic Organisation since 1989.

62. Through the International Coordination of the Young Christian Workers (ICYCW) the Movement offers young people the opportunity to grow in awareness of the international aspect of their lives and to have international and intercultural experiences.

The ICYCW promotes and facilitates meetings and exchanges between national movements. It coordinates the sharing of experience and helps to build solidarity, mutual links of friendship and support.

The ICYCW has a representative role at international level. It makes the voice of young people of the popular milieu heard within the Church and to international institutions and associations.

“We believe that all these young working lads and girls are called by God Himself to a magnificent divine destiny, which is the sole reason for their existence, the sole end of their temporal and eternal life. Not beasts of burden, machines or slaves; but sons of God, collaborators with God, heirs of God” (J. Cardijn)

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