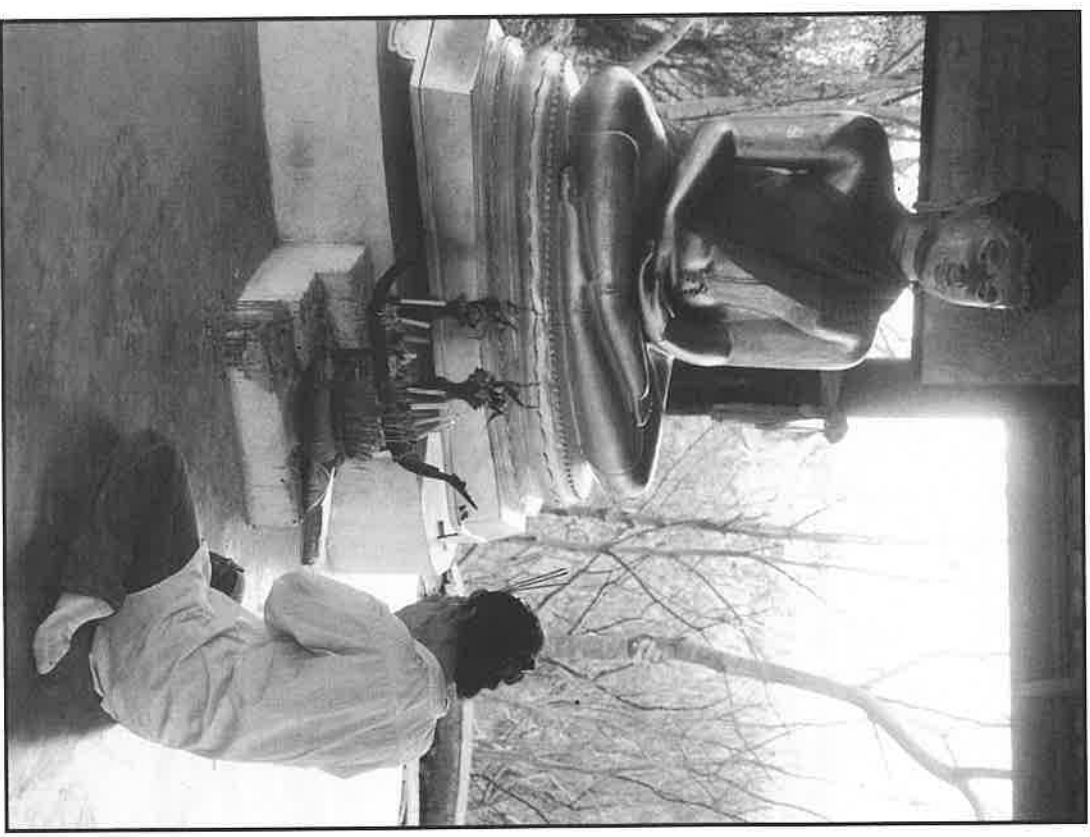


## INITIATING THE YCW



Thailand

---

# Don't Skip the Study Stage

---

## Introduction

So you have been asked to take on the responsibility for initiating a new YCW group? It is an exciting challenge and the temptation is to get active immediately. Experience tells that success is more likely, however, if you begin by doing the preparation work well. So give yourself space to think, to plan and also to make decisions about recruiting a team to assist you in the work.

To start a new YCW group is an important work that could have big effects on the lives of many people. It is also a work that will involve and commit you over a six months period. So it is important that the work be successful. Success, of course, depends on many things and not all of these are controllable. There are three important aims to be achieved in this preparation or study stage.

## Recruiting a team

The first thing to do is to recruit a small team to work together in starting the YCW. For example, if the group is to be set up in a parish, the team could consist of a YCW leader, a priest of the parish and a couple of young workers from the parish. If we want to start a group in a factory, the team might consist of one or two YCW leaders and one or two workers from the factory.

There are many people involved in achieving most worthwhile projects. A sporting team, for example, needs selectors, coaches,

administrators, and supporters as well as players. All have their part to play. It is important that all are recognised and given scope to be involved. It is important that all work together as a team.

When it comes to initiating a new YCW group, it is helpful to spend some time with pencil and paper thinking about what you are planning to do and reflecting quietly on how to achieve it. If you decide to work with a team you will need to clarify a number of questions.

*What do you mean by a 'team'?*

*What are the advantages of working with a team?*

*Who do you want to have in the team?*

*What do you expect them to do?*

*How will you ensure that all work together?*

### **What sort of team should we have to start a YCW group?**

The team should be a small group of people who are willing to be responsible for the new group. This means that they should support one another, work together, and accept the successes and failures that come. It does not mean that they will all do the same work or even all take equal responsibility.

For example, as a YCW leader you know that there is a lot of work to be done in contacting young workers, and that there is a real skill in being able to communicate with them about the YCW. You would hope therefore to have some other good YCW leader to help you with the work and to support you in the hard times.

To be successful the new group will also need support and assistance of the parish, a place to meet, and the aid of local knowledge. That is why it is important that the parish priest or parish workers be represented on the team. Most parish priests, parish workers, and parish councils are concerned with the problems facing young workers in the parish. Most will enthusiastically support and encourage initiatives to support them. Naturally they like to be consulted and informed, and in some way to be a part of what is happening.

### **The advantages of working in a team**

When a group works together as a team they each bring different ideas and talents. A good leader is one who can recognise the special talents of others and find a way for those talents and gifts to be shared. You will discover that the joys of success are increased, not lessened, by being shared within a team. And if your team is successful then all members will also gain great experience and formation in how to start a group.

If you have ever tried to light a campfire or a barbecue you will know that it is almost impossible to light a fire with only one stick. Fire blazes up only in places where two or more sticks touch. So also if you pull one fiercely burning stick out of the fire and hold it up as a torch, very quickly the flame dies. Why is this? It is because fire is a communal thing, it is a group action.

There is something very important here for all of us to learn. The YCW has a saying, "A good leader never acts alone". We do our best to teach this to the new members of every group. We should also show it to them by the way that we organise the initiation of their group. It is a great advantage when the new YCW group can get started with the support and understanding of many in the community.

### **What are the difficulties of this team approach?**

This idea of starting YCW groups by recruiting a team is not always successful. I recall one YCW leader who spent a lot of time, organising her team. She reported that there were many difficulties in finding a time when all could meet, and when they did meet there was a lot of talking but little action. For this leader the team approach was one big headache.

Another leader made big efforts to get the parish priest on the team but faced many difficulties because of this. The priest had little understanding of the YCW but had his own ideas of what he wanted the youth of the parish to do. He wanted them to discuss the Bible not their life. He wanted them to take action in the parish not in their workplace.

It is good to reflect on these difficulties before you start so that you can plan a way to overcome them. Perhaps the best method is to set clear goals before you begin the work.

## Setting clear goals

When you get your team together, the first thing to do will be to discuss and agree on the goals you wish to achieve. This may not be an easy task. So before you get the team together it is important that you sit down with pencil and paper to reflect and plan.

## Who should set the goals?

As initiator and leader it is natural that you should have some firm ideas about what sort of group you want. There will be some things that you will regard as essential for a YCW group. You must be clear on what these are.

On the other hand it is essential that you respect every member of your team. They have ideas and talents, and they will want to express them. Probably compromises will have to be made.

## Why is it so important to fix clear goals?

If you can begin with a clear understanding and agreement about the goals of the YCW it will solve many problems. Sometimes a parish feels the need to organise 'something for youth' and only agrees to having the YCW because it is a means. They have not made any study of what is specific and essential to the YCW.

## What is specific and essential for a YCW group?

It is not easy to answer this because the YCW should always adapt and be based on the needs of the members. From my own experience I believe that the following are important considerations.

### *The YCW is a movement of young workers*

It has a special commitment to workers based on a belief in the dignity of work and the worker. It is not aimed at supporting secondary students or even tertiary students. This means that it is young workers who are working or unemployed that we will invite to join.

This is not, of course, an inflexible rule. There are many students who are part-time workers. Work pressure forces many to spend extra years at school in order to acquire a job. Some students have joined YCW while still at school and have found in the YCW a good foundation for future working life.

### *The YCW is a worker movement*

Its centre of interest is the lay life of its members, in the workplace and in the society. It aims to organise and form workers to initiate action in their own life situations. This means that the YCW must be run and organised by young workers themselves. It means that their action will be worker action in their daily life.

Again this is not an inflexible rule. YCW groups have always found time to support parish activities as a group and also to organise activities to support other groups. They should not, however, be continually pressured to undertake this sort of work at the expense of their primary responsibility.

### *The fundamental and essential method of the YCW is the Review of Life and Worker Action - ROLWA*

It is, of course, organised and achieved in different ways by different communities but it remains the most important

means of the movement. This means that ROLWA will be given priority always in the meetings of the group.

## Uniting the team in action

Let us suppose that you are really clear in what you want to achieve, and that you have recruited a team that you feel will be able to assist and collaborate in this work. How should you go about getting the team active and united?

It is important that the team meet on a number of occasions and that these meetings be well prepared and structured. This will set the tone and standard of how the team takes on their work and it will bring clarity and unity. Each meeting should also be a progressive step in action to get the group started. Each meeting should end with all team members committed to a clear action.

### So what should take place at these meetings?

#### 1. Building friendship and respect

In the meetings we should take time to share about ourselves, who we are what we do. We should also share about our motivation for taking on this work, what we hope to achieve etc. The team is not just a group who take on a task, they should become friends and co-workers in doing something worthwhile to make the world a better place.

#### 2. Study and sharing about young workers situations

The YCW is not something fixed and immovable. It must be adapted to suit the needs and priority concerns of its members. The team should study the situations facing the young workers that they are going to try to organise. It is difficult to attract young workers if you do not understand their situation.

As a result of this study, the team will decide what sort of group should be started. At present, in the Asia Pacific region, we have four main types of groups: Parish groups, Workplace groups, Neighbourhood groups and Category groups.

### 3. Study and sharing about YCW orientation and method

It is very important that there be unity in these matters. There are a number of articles about the YCW in this book. Perhaps you could discuss one article or some pages of an article. This helps the team to clarify their ideas and methods and to deepen their understanding but it also ensures that differences do not arise causing confusion to the new members.

When the new group begins to meet there will be little time for team meetings and much need for the team to be aware and prepared for what is ahead. It is important that the team be reading ahead and that there be a sharing of their ideas about future responsibilities.

#### 4. Action planning and evaluation

There are a number of things that should be accomplished during this 'study stage'. The plans to achieve these things could be distributed over three or four meetings of the team and follow-up and evaluation of the work could be done at the next meeting.

The things that should be done include:

- Team to read and discuss some key articles about the YCW.
- Find statistics on youth and youth problems of the area.
- Meet and talk with other agencies and resources involved in young worker issues in the area.
- Build a list of names and addresses of young workers in the area.
- Make decisions on what sort of group will be set up.
- Find a suitable place to meet.
- Advertising of the group to be organised and done.

## Example agenda for the first meeting

### Preparation

Ask all the team to read the chapter "How the YCW began" before coming to the meeting.

### Opening of meeting

#### *Building friendship and respect*

Introduce yourself - and ask each person to introduce themselves and to talk about how they came to take on this work and what are their hopes.

#### *Study and sharing about young workers situations*

Talk about the situation that faced workers in the Industrial Revolution (Cardijn's time) and it's effects on young workers. Ask team members to share about what they see are the most important situations affecting young workers today.

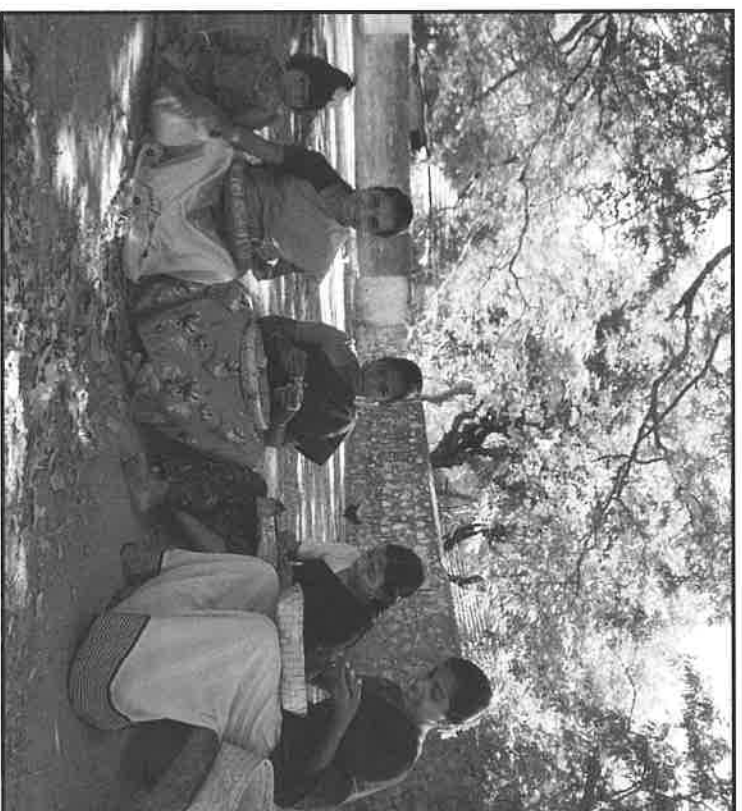
#### *Study and sharing about YCW orientation and method*

Ask team members to share what they feel was most significant about Cardijn's answer to the problems of his day. Read together "What is specific and essential to the YCW" (refer to p. 71). Discuss.

#### *Action planning and evaluation*

- Plan what we will read before next meeting to deepen our understanding of the YCW
- Organise one member of the team to lead this part of the next meeting.
- Begin the work of getting a list of names and addresses of young workers.
- Begin work of going out to meet other agencies and resources for young workers in the area. What can we learn from them about the problems facing young workers in the area?

## Methods of Organisation



India

## There are many ways to organise young workers

Before you start a YCW group you should first reflect about what sort of group will best serve your people. The YCW is a very flexible organisation. There is no one method that will cover all situations. Always remember that our starting point is the situations that the young workers are facing.

The YCW aims at helping young workers to discover the deepest meaning of life by confronting these situations. Our aim is not simply to start a group but to initiate and form some young worker leaders. It is a longer term aim demanding a six to eight months commitment.

The first task of the initiating team is to study the situations of young workers in the area. The group we form will, hopefully, be a response to these things. Perhaps young workers in your city or parish are all pretty much alike. There are no obvious divisions among them and they all seem to share the same kinds of lifestyle and problems. And so you may decide to start a general group for young workers and to form a community of them. There are many such YCW groups but this method will not be suitable in many other situations.

For example: Thousands of Filipino young women come to Hong Kong to work as domestic workers. They have borrowed money for their ticket and for the employing agent's fees. They must first work to repay this loan and to earn enough for their ticket back home.

If, for any reason, their employment is terminated, they are in great trouble. They must return immediately to the Philippines but they have no money. Many try to remain and to get another job but they are illegal migrants hiding from the police.

These workers work six days a week. Most of them are required to 'live-in' with their employers and to be constantly available. Many have serious work problems. There are labour laws outlining their rights but it is difficult for one young foreign worker to stand for her rights against her employer.

On Sundays thousands of these workers meet in Statue Square. They sit in groups, eating packed lunches, writing home or just talking. It is their one day off and they are lonely and wanting other young company. How would you organise these young workers? Could their situations be effectively addressed in a general group with other Hong Kong young workers?

In Pakistan cities many Christians live in 'Christian colonies'. This means they all live together in small slum houses within a predominantly Muslim city. They are poorer than their Muslim neighbours and they suffer discrimination because of being Christians. At school they were not allowed to drink from the same cups as their Muslim friends. Now they are refused service in many shops and excluded from many forms of employment. Most young men work as sanitation workers, operate petrol pumps, white-wash walls or they are unemployed.

How can we organise an effective YCW in such a society? Will we organise only Christians - or will we try to form a mixed group of Muslims as well? Should we try to organise all young workers in a colony or would it be more effective to organise a group of, for example, sanitation workers?

I recall visiting a village in South India where there are many young Dalit women. Culture and tradition decree that they must not leave home to look for work but there is no work in the village. So, many of them take on work rolling 'beedie cigarettes'. The agent supplies tobacco and 'beedie leaf'. The girls meet under a tree to sit on the ground, rolling cigarettes in leaf and tying them with cotton thread. There is no difficulty in organising these young women to 'meet' for they meet every day at the water well and under the tree where they work.

Compare this situation with that of the Chinese migrant workers working in factories in Macau. They work ten hours a day, six days a week and then must do overtime after work and on Sundays. One girl was ten months in Macau and had not had even one day off. The YCW group starts meeting at 9.30pm on Sunday evenings and even then some arrive late after work. The initiator of a YCW group in the Indian village has a very different task from the person trying to organise a YCW in Macau.

These are the things we need to know about the area. Perhaps in one area there are a lot of factories. The workers are young migrants from the provinces who live in dormitories. It may be effective to start a parish YCW and try to attract some of these girls to come along. It may be more effective to try to make friends with one of these young migrants and motivate her to start a group in the factory.

The second task of the team is to decide on what sort of group will best fill the needs of the young workers in the area.

In the Asia Pacific region we have four main types of groups. They have been developed because of different needs.

- Parish groups
- Neighbourhood groups
- Category groups
- Workplace groups

## Parish groups

Many parishes feel a responsibility to be involved with post school youth and with worker issues. The YCW offers a means to achieve these aims.

The parish group is made up of a group of young worker leaders. They meet every week to review their life and plan worker action. Sometimes a parish group of leaders will also form another larger group of members within the parish. This second group will be part of their responsibility as a YCW group.

The parish group can face difficulties if it is seen as a parish youth group with many duties to perform in the parish. Sometimes also parish groups come under pressure to spend most of their time studying the bible. The YCW is motivated by Gospel values - but it is not a bible study group.

## Neighbourhood groups

There are circumstances where it is better to build a neighbourhood group than a parish group

For example: if a community is torn apart for some reason - religious or racial or whatever - it may not be very effective to start a group that caters only for Catholics, or for migrants.

Sometimes the biggest problem is a community problem. It can be only solved by uniting all the young workers of that community. A parish group will not be a practical solution.

In many parts of our region, Christians are a very small minority. A parish group can be a great support to young Christian workers. It may be the only place where they can discuss their values and beliefs openly. But it may stop non-Christians from joining the group.

## Do we want non-Christians in the YCW?

The YCW began as a response to the worker problem and the effects this was having on young workers. It proposed a different vision - a vision of how work could be organised more justly and a vision of how young workers could and should live. This vision is based on the vision proclaimed by Christ, a vision that was meant for all peoples.

There have always been non-practicing Christians and non-Christians in the YCW. As early as 1938 Protestants and Anglicans joined the YCW. Then animists in Africa, young Jews during World War II, then Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims.

The YCW in Asia once approached a famous Cardinal asking for support to employ a full-time worker for the extension of YCW. The Cardinal said: "I will support the employment of two fulltimers but one of them must be a Christian and the other a Muslim. There can be no answer to workers' problems in this country by setting up a separatist group."

The result is that today there are countries where there are non-Christians in the YCW. However, in other countries, this is discouraged or forbidden by the local bishops.



### **Integration does not mean compromise**

There are difficulties in starting YCW as a neighbourhood group; a group that is open to all young workers of the neighbourhood.

It can mean that the group is united only in the self centred aim of improving their economic situation. This, of course, is not the YCW.

It can mean that the group is looked on with suspicion by some that it will be seen as a means of trying to convert people to the Catholic faith.

It can mean that the group will have difficulty in getting support from the Church.

If you think of starting a neighbourhood group you will need to study these matters - and organise to prevent these difficulties from undermining your work.

### **Category groups**

The category group is another successful means of organising the YCW. A category group is made up of members from one work sector. For example: they may be all workers in electronic factories, or all nurses, or all migrant workers or all unemployed workers.

Category groups have one obvious advantage. The members share a common life situation. When they meet they will very naturally share experiences. The members will easily understand one another's situations. They can more easily organise common action.

Forming category groups also has its dangers and difficulties. The group may talk only about their common situation. They may come to regard the group as a place where this is the only thing discussed. If a member changes their life situation there is a difficulty in how to continue to belong to the group. If you think of starting a category group you will need to study these things and make plans. The way a group starts is often the way that it will continue.

### **Workplace groups**

In some countries there are large numbers of young workers working together in the same factory. They work long hours in the factory. Often they also live close to the factory, in slums or dormitories or high rise buildings. In such situations the YCW often organises groups in the workplace. Like category groups these groups have the advantage that members share the same life situation. They understand one another's situation easily. They can cooperate with one another in action in the workplace.

Workplace groups also share the difficulties of category groups. In many countries the YCW has a large role in the formation of trade unions in the workplace. The YCW leaders are naturally elected to the union leadership. There is a difficulty in working out where the YCW ends its work and the union begins. The YCW leaders can become so involved in the work of union negotiation that the work of formation is neglected.

Once again, if you decide to start a group in the workplace, study first these problems and have a clear idea on the direction to take.

### **In Conclusion...**

There is no right way or universally better way to do this work. Every case is different. I challenge you to study your situation and to make the decisions on what sort of YCW to form - what situations it will primarily address - what basis it will have for coming together. I challenge you not to just take the easy way but to choose the most fitting way.

The YCW is not a youth club, it is a young workers' movement. Our aim is not simply to start another group, or to "do something for the youth in the area", or to involve the youth in the parish. Believing, as we do, in the unique purpose and possibility of each young worker's life, we want to accompany them in their important struggle, to view their life with enthusiasm, to see the possibilities of how their life can make a difference, and to inspire and motivate them to participate, become involved and take action. We want to form them as leaders with convictions and skills to take their place in life.