

History of the CYO in the Archdiocese of Washington

In the mid 1940's, twenty five Catholic businessmen decided to inaugurate a local Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), comparable to what was being founded and growing in popularity in many other dioceses at the time. Whether official ecclesiastical sanction was given at this time is not known. Nevertheless, history reveals that Fr. Thomas Dade (now Msgr. Dade) was the first CYO Executive Director and laid the basic foundation for the CYO in the Archdiocese of Washington. He gave the CYO the leadership, guidance and direction to develop its philosophy, organization and program. In the early days this consisted mainly of running athletic leagues with about 25-30 teams, generally coming from the parochial school enrollment. The CYO became a non-profit corporation and hired two laymen, Pete Haley and Pat Kane. They set up office in one room down in the old USO building on Eleventh Street near St. Patrick's, where Msgr. Dade was assigned at the time, with a budget of \$25,000, which was raised from private sources. Other early Executive Directors included Fr. Edwin A. Lockett, Fr. E. Carl Lyon, and Msgr. William J. Awalt.

From a very modest beginning, the Washington CYO program developed broader dimensions in order to meet the needs and interests of parish youth groups. Religious, cultural and social activities were added to the original athletic program. Later, community service projects were added as youth indicated their interest in such programs. The parish youth council plan was then instituted in parishes, with the administration vested in the parish CYO moderator, youth officers, youth committeemen and adult advisors. The Archdiocesan Youth Council later came into being in order to give young people a voice in their program at the Archdiocesan level. Training programs in youth leadership development, for adult advisors, and workshops for parish CYO moderators became regular events. An Archdiocesan council for adult advisors was instituted to assist the Executive Director in administration, policy formation, and the conduct of various intra-diocesan programs that developed into inter-diocesan contests. In the 1950's the Archdiocesan CYO Council was affiliated with the National CYO Federation, with the young people from the archdiocese taking an active part in the National Council of Catholic Youth. In this growth

and development, the Washington CYO kept up with the national trend of diocesan Catholic youth work.

Nationally, the CYO can trace its beginnings to the early 1930's in the Archdiocese of Chicago, under the inspired and dynamic leadership of the late Auxiliary Bishop Bernard J. Sheil. As a prison chaplain, Fr. Sheil never forgot the many walks he took with men on their way to the gallows, assured in his heart that their destiny could have been different if they had only had more constructive outlets in their youth. Convinced that not enough was being done to counter-act the admiration that young people had for gangsters and bootlegging hoodlums during the roaring 1920's, he proposed a plan to his Ordinary, the late George Cardinal Mundelein, which he felt would engage the energies, desires, ambitions and dreams of youth. His efforts were focused on the parishes in Chicago in which a priest knew his people – their problems and hopes. His dream envisioned laymen as co-partners on the diocesan level. With Bishop Sheil's inspiration, youth centers sprang up in Chicago that were used for social and athletic activities, especially boxing. This kind of drop-in center for young people led to the popular expression of having these programs to "keep youth off the streets".

Bishop Sheil never envisioned the national scope that the CYO has today. Because the CYO is diocesan in authority and its balanced program of athletic, religious, cultural, social and community activities were parochial in function, it appealed to the American bishops and had a natural appeal to young people and adult laity. As for its purpose, the CYO developed the essential elements in enabling the Church to assist young people in their search for Christian maturity.

The CYO is an organization for youth, by youth and with youth of the parishes. The supervision, leadership and guidance are provided by the parish clergy and laity, allowing for the involvement of young people for its design, plan of operation and conduct of activities. CYO is parish-centered and parish supervised.

The CYO is national in scope, diocesan in authority and parochial in function. When properly constituted, both on the diocesan and parish level, it provides the structure and substance with is vital and necessary within which ministry to young people can be exercised and experienced.