

# Abschlussbericht

## 1. Qualitative questions:

- **Which goals for the project did you set in the application/in the initial phase? Did you achieve these goals?**

To develop the pastoral work of youth ministry in accordance with the youth ministry guidelines (confirmed in February 2020) and to coordinate the work in The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Riga.

Yes, both goals were accomplished, and even more. Currently, joint work in youth work in Latvia is starting to be organized. Not only within one diocese but all dioceses together.

- **Did you develop further goals during the project? If so, did you achieve them?**

Yes, new goals were set - to organize united work in Latvia, so that all parties are involved: bishops, priests, catechists, organizations, Catholic schools, parents of young people, and youth leaders of parishes, as well as to create ecumenical fellowship among Christian young people and go together to the World Youth Days in 2023. To train youth leaders in congregations and establish cooperation within dioceses.

## 2. Which activities did you carry out?

1. **Situation awareness in youth work.** The project started during Covid time. Initially, the situation in Latvian youth pastoral work was identified. In order to obtain information about the overall picture, about 120 interviews were conducted. Interviews with priests, representatives of organizations, lay people, as well as youth leaders of other denominations. Further, interviews were also organized with youth leaders from other countries (Sweden, Malta, Great Britain, Ireland, France, etc.) to learn from their experience and get suggestions on how to better start coordinating work with youth. Also many meetings with representatives of the youth field from the state structure, about opportunities for young people and current projects.

2. **Joint work with youth organizations.** Mainly, pastoral work with youth was organized through organizations and communities, less in parishes. Therefore, a group of representatives of organizations was formed. Regular meetings were held and a Facebook group was created. At present, a closed group of FB with youth leaders lays and representatives of organizations, schools, communities, priests and others has been established, which already has 90 members. For example, information on Christian

camps and the dates, and ages for which these camps are planned are now in one document and youth don't need to search in each organization's web materials. It is very convenient for youth and their families.

Goals and problems were identified, which is why young people participate less and less in church activities. A resource map is developed to identify all the organizations involved in youth work and to plan how these organizations can work together more successfully on a day-to-day basis and how to pool resources.

3. **Meetings, seminars, and training.** Congregations, communities, organizations, priests, and catechists were informed about the goal of jointly organizing youth work. Conferences of priests, participation in catechetical seminars "Impulse", lectures - The role of youth in the common path of the Church. How to work with young people during Covid, and what materials to use for remote work (translated materials such as the Sycamore video series - methodological material and 20 episodes now in Latvian to work with youth in parishes, and the book Tweeting with God in Latvian, as well other materials). Organizations were sent information about what materials, in general, they can use with young people, including Alpha for young people, Youcat, Josiah Venture materials, etc.).

4. Participation in the **Bishops' conference** where all Latvian Bishops are introduced to the youth pastoral work and all activities.

5. Several **working groups** were organized to work with important topics: **Theology of the flesh**, A program is currently being developed for young people from 10-12. class. Its leader is Manuel Fernandez within the University of Latvia, there is the development of a morality program, which has already been established from 1. to 9. class, it talks about a variety of values, including conflict resolution, addictions, volunteering, communities, and more. We are planning to involve Catholic Gymnasium youth to meet in youth evenings and to discuss this program and moral questions. Student work with several representatives directly related to Christian student organizations: Agape Latvia, the Latvian Christian student fellowship, Chemin Neuf, Opus Dei, etc., to jointly develop a strategy on how to successfully evangelize students and all cooperate in this work. As well as the identification and goals of family organizations. How to work more successfully with parents and young people in parishes, and what are the current problems and goals?

6. **Hackathons** - an event where youth engage in rapid collaboration over a relatively short period of time such as 24 or 48 hours and come up with a project or idea. Hackathon Vol1 was organized in 2021. In Hackathon, four main themes were raised: leisure and socialization of young people, support for young people in various aspects of life, skills, and knowledge needed for real life, and a sense of belonging to the local community, support for young people, and self-confidence. A total of 23 young people participated

in Hackathon and each of the teams was assigned one of the issues. Leaders and mentors were involved in the teams, who helped with their knowledge and skills. From this Hackathon Vol1, many young people were involved in the project Rise Up and now we see that the same leaders are in the World Youth days team and organizes also Camp Oasis for youth from 14 to 18 years old.

**Hackathon Vol2** on the topic "Relationships" was organized. The young people had the opportunity to think about how to help during this time and improve their relationships with friends, God, family, and themselves. After this hackathon, an idea was developed and a "Family Adventure Book " was created, where there are many useful ideas for the family to spend time together. It is currently planned to publish the book in a larger edition. After both these Hackathons youth came up with the idea of the project "Rise up", which will help Christian youth to Rise up themselves during and after Covid and to help other youth as well.

**7. The project "RISE UP"** was completed from June 2021 to January 2022. There were many activities in this project that involved Christian youth. Volunteer work with the organization "Don't stay alone" where young people had the opportunity to serve other young people, meet children with special needs, and spend time together. Opportunity to go on various trips, and participate in recollections, fellowships, and joint prayers. Participate in training on how to create content and how to work with children with special needs. In Radio Maria Latvia youth created podcasts and filmed testimonials. They recorded 20 podcasts and 8 video stories. Podcasts on topics: Emotions; How to love yourself; Worship; Differences in denominations; Discipline; Deep and true friendships, etc. Mentoring, the young people each had a mentor, who met with the young person for six months, helping to set goals and guide the young person. Also group mentoring, where youth met every month and discussed questions about their lives and faith.

**8. Organization of diocese youth days**, at St. Jacob's Cathedral, 20.11. 22. The Mass was celebrated by the Archbishop and attended by young people. All parishes in Latvia were invited to celebrate Mass on this day and to involve young people in the liturgy. The second meeting was held on 20.11.22. In St. Francis Catholic Church, Riga. Getting to know more about the World Youth Day 2023 in Lisbon, fellowship event, Holy Mass, and adoration.

**9. Organizing Youth Alpha**, 11 meetings with 25 youth and youth leaders - organization, planning, team building. Youth Alpha was organized from April to June 2022.

**10. The youth camp OASIS is for youth from 14-18 years, four times per year.** 40-60 young people and 15-25 youth leaders participated in each camp from different Latvian cities. There were various evenings, during which young people had the opportunity to listen to various lectures, participate in master classes, as well as listen to testimonies, and Masses, evenings of forgiveness, during which the young people reflected on their relationship with their

parents, loved ones, and God. The biggest benefit is the formation of young people in matters of faith and the formation of a team, in which most youth leaders are involved.

**11. Communication channels, social networks, and broadcasts,** interviews, reflect the opinion of young people. Expressing a common opinion about the importance of working with young people in churches. Video testimonies, audio podcasts, radio broadcasts, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube accounts through which other young people are addressed, who may not yet belong to any church yet.

**12. Cooperation with several organizations: Conference of European Bishops (CCEE) Symposium on youth work, the new generation, and communication with it.**

**COMECE Youth Net** where youth can express their views on European policy initiatives, dialogue with other youth from all over Europe, and share the vision of young people with the Bishops from the European Bishop Conferences.

**13. Cooperation with Latvian youth organizations and municipal institutions.** International Youth Affairs Agency (JSPA), youth resource center (PRC), Office of the European Parliament ect.

**14. Pilgrimages to Skaistkalne and Aglona each year.** There were many young people who actually are leaders from parishes. During the pilgrimages, it was a great opportunity to discuss possible ideas on how to involve young people in various projects, and churches, and also to learn what activities are already taking place in parishes.

**15. Work with youth leaders in parishes** has started. The idea of organizing events for youth leaders where youth leaders will have the opportunity to share their experiences and tell others about their work at the parish, listen to lectures on youth work, and get acquainted with the materials to be used. Problems were initially identified. During Covid, the work with young people was completely stopped in all congregations, which created a big gap. Also the problem of generational change, as many youth leaders who had led youth work before the COVID period moved, started families, or were burned out in ministry and stopped it. Thus, after COVID, youth work had to be fundamentally restructured. Youth leaders needed motivation and they needed the opportunity to meet other leaders to share ideas, problems, and goals. Motivate each other for this work. Several weekends were organized retreats where youth leaders had the opportunity to meet together, spend time in prayers, have conversations, listen to speeches, and receive support and encouragement. It was vitally necessary to start creating pastoral work with young people in parishes. Youth leaders need support not only by offering room for youth events in parishes, and for organizing youth evenings but above all, for spiritual support and encouragement.

**16. Silence retreats for youth leaders.** Youth leaders need more than anything to reconnect with their Creator so that their ministry flows out of their relationships with their Heavenly Father. But it's so hard to do it these days. A person needs to retreat once in a while and go back to silence. To be in the presence of God. To reconnect with Him and hear from Him. So silence retreat was organized already two times and will be organized also in the future, hopefully, 6 times per year. Together, 12 youth leaders as 12 disciples of Jesus, spent 3 days without mobile phones, the internet, and social media. Without other people around and without packed schedules for the day. As they finally calmed down from the daily rush many of them encountered the presence of God. This silence retreats in my eyes and brings the biggest value for the youth work here in Latvia.

**17. Leaders training seminars.** Youth leaders seminar called Leadership DNA. For youth leaders to give more encouragement and knowledge on how to lead youth in parishes, how to develop leadership skills, and get motivated. Another problem for youth leaders is that they do not see this leadership in themselves and are afraid of the responsibility of working with youth leaders in churches. These seminars greatly inspired young people to realize that leadership skills need to be trained, they can be acquired through development.

**18. Creating a team. Advisory team** - in the first two years, the support team consisted of Pēteris Skudra, Velta Skolmeistere, and Claudio Rivera. This was a very important aspect, that helped to understand the situation, help navigate past events in the field of youth, and to pray together to recognize and not do anything superfluous. A **youth chaplain** (Pēteris Skudra) was much-needed support both for spiritual companionship and guidance and counseling for better discernment and decision-making. Without this support, neither the Rise Up project nor many other things would have been realized, and personal encouragement and care for mental health were also crucial to avoid burnout or overload. In my opinion, a youth chaplain is very necessary for this area and is the primary support for youth leaders to spiritually strengthen and encourage them.

Second, it was a **prayer group** that provided support to recognize God's will and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Priest Arnis Mazilevskis and several youth leaders were on this team and prayed for this ministry every week. After a year and a half, several young people applied to the Katolis.jauniešiem team to jointly plan activities that young people would find interesting and also express their opinions and ideas on how to better address young people in parishes. At the moment, this team consists of 4 people with whom we meet regularly - every week and go through the material about youth ministry in the congregations (Bible studies, testimonies, practical recommendations).

**The Oasis Latvia team** includes more than 20 youth leaders from various Latvian cities. Actively plans camps four times a year, prays for the return of young people, and evangelization of young people in Oasis camps.

The **ecumenical fellowship** team also includes the youth leader Andrejs Goloborodko, the Baptist denomination, and the youth leader Elīna Ermansone of the Lutheran denomination. Regular meetings and gatherings, sharing of experiences, and ecumenical fellowship. Joint retreats, training, and events for youth leaders to share experiences.

The **World Youth Day team** includes representatives of communities, several youth leaders, and representatives of dioceses from all over Latvia. Joint work on marketing materials, video creation, and website maintenance, work with the media, joint events for Latvian youth planning to go to Lisbon, work with dioceses, parishes, and priests, translation, work on travel planning and program development, etc.

**Strategy and planning team** together with Lūcija Čiekure. Shared vision and direction during and after the World Youth Days.

### 3. Did you reach your target group? How did the project influence them?

Yes, the target group was reached, they are youth leaders in parishes and future youth leaders. After a two-year period of work, I realized that I was not able to organize all the youth work, both inside and outside the parishes. A large team is required. This team must be united and have formation and spiritual support from priests. At the moment, Oase camps are the place where I see results and where young people from 14-18 years of age are formed, moreover, regularly and in relatively large numbers.

The second target group is leaders aged 18-30 who are involved in other organizations, projects, and parishes and are involved in the World Youth Day team.

The project affected them in a direct way, giving them the opportunity to recognize their vocation, the opportunity to participate and get involved in the life of the congregations, to learn new skills and knowledge, to share with other young people about important life topics, to feel belonging and useful in the congregations - playing musical instruments, participating in the liturgy, translating, etc. Thanks to the project, it was possible to meet with these young people regularly, to organize youth evenings where this fellowship could take place.

### 4. What insights into the pastoral work of the church did you gain in the project?

Youth need spirituality and God. In this uncertain century in which we are now, in a rush where there is no time to listen and be present - the Church is one of the rare places where young people feel heard, welcomed, and understood. Christ is the one who can fill this emptiness, anxiety, and despair. Therefore, there is no doubt about the necessity of the Church. The problem is how to let young people know that this is the place and how to tell this new generation about Jesus Christ. How to speak their language and reach them? The gap is very large between the new generation and

priests, bishops, and laypeople who have been serving in parishes for many years. This generation has many questions and is looking for meaning in everything that is good but also challenging. They ask - why do we sing old songs during Holy Mass? What happens during the various liturgical processes? What is the Holy Spirit? How can I receive these gifts that the Bible talks about? Questions about the Holy Eucharist, Forgiveness, Healing and Mission, Mary and the Hope of Heaven, and more.

Insight during this project: Young people need the Church and the Church needs young people. Young people who have already experienced God in their lives through camps, spiritual fellowship, retreats, and personal meetings are the ones who can address other young people in their language. The Church is a great place to give young people the opportunity to participate in all processes - with their ideas, enthusiasm, zeal, and ability to ignite other young people. Therefore, it is necessary to talk with all the parties involved, everyone should sit at the same table to finally hear each other - bishops, priests, organizations, communities, schools, parents, lay people, and also the young people themselves. And Jesus, who unites all, must be invited to this table.

## 5 To what extent did the project have an impact in the surrounding area / in the city / in the diocese?

Initially, only parishes in the Riga Diocese were reached, but with the Rise Up project, the situation changed. Young people responded and got involved even from more distant regions, these were youth leaders who stayed alone in the Covid situation, the number of young people in the congregations was decreasing and the youth leaders needed support. In general, during the project, young people from all dioceses got involved, which is also the new goal of joint work of young people throughout Latvia.



## 6. What happens after the end of the funding? Will the project continue?

Currently, many activities and initiatives have been launched.

- Work with youth leaders, leadership training, spiritual guidance, youth safeguarding, etc.
- Communication with bishops and the bishops' conference. Discernment, recognition, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, spiritual companionship.
- Work with a team.
- Work with priests and Seminarians.
- Work with schools.
- Work with young people - evangelization, recognition of vocation, St. Masses for vocations with the presence of children and young people, youth involvement in parishes, events, camps, and pilgrimages.
- Work with organizations, communities, etc.
- Explanation of the liturgy, and Holy Masses for young people.
- Voluntary work, developing cooperation with Caritas, etc. organizations.
- Succession - first communion, the sacrament of confirmation, youth work in the parish, student organizations, etc.
- World Youth days, Lisbon 2023.
- Youth Days in Latvia 2024/25.

Thanks to the project started by Bonifatiuswerk, youth work continues in Latvia and Latvian bishops have agreed to support united work in the future period, also by paying salary for youth work coordinator Anda Aleksandrova until World Youth Day. At the moment, the only problems are the attraction of funding and the fact that the Church of Latvia does not have many funds that could be used for this service. It is necessary to attract supporters and sponsors or write other types of projects in the future. The impact of the project on young people is huge and it is definitely necessary to continue it so that the invested work is not in vain. Youth work must be coordinated, otherwise, it is not strategic and systematic, which in the long term appears as a lack of young people in the churches.

## 7. Did you point out the funding by Bonifatiuswerk?

Yes, also we made a video post about the two-year project and Bonifatiuswerk support:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/74sh6hzgzp7kua1/Bonifatiuswerk%20%282%29.mp4?dl=0>



## 8. Do you have any feedback for Bonifatiuswerk?

Thanks to the financial support of Bonifatiuswerk, the unity, and the support of Latvian bishops regarding the issue of youth pastoral work in Latvia, and the prayers of many people, big changes have taken place in two years. Despite the difficult situation in the world, the time of Covid, and the general public opinion that young people do not need faith at the moment, we have managed to prove the opposite. Right now, young people need the Church and Jesus more than ever. Young people have a lot of questions and are looking for meaning in their life, existence, and the world. They need hope and purpose beyond just their own selfish desires and short-term plans. Young people want to serve others, want to learn, and recognize their vocations. Thanks to this financial support, we had the opportunity to create coordinated work throughout Latvia, in which all parties are involved. The young people had the opportunity to meet both for mentoring programs and to organize camps, and fellowship events, and currently, a team of about 20 young people, who are mostly youth leaders from Latvian parishes, is organizing a trip to World Youth Day. The Church gives these young people opportunities to develop their talents, giving each one responsibility in the area that matches their talents and desire to grow. Therefore, I would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who helped and supported this project over two years. The biggest benefit is the youth leaders, who now themselves want to share this gift of faith with other young people who come with their own ideas and want to realize them, to serve both in the congregations and in the Church as a whole, including their loved ones. Finally, many of them have seen their true identity, who they are, in Jesus Christ. It is the entry of a whole generation into a Christian environment, encouragement, and support to start the pastoral work of these young people.

## 8. Did the work on the project affect your personal faith? If yes, how?

This project has had a great impact on me personally, my spiritual life, and my relationship with God. When I started this ministry, my spiritual father warned me that God does not give this ministry by merit, but by need. He was absolutely right. In this service and work, I was broken and risen up, I was able to discover an incredible amount of my talents and skills, which I myself had no idea about until now. If initially I did not realize and admit that I can be a leader, then during the project I believed in it and it also helped me to develop these skills. Communication with youth, leaders, mentoring and spiritual companionship, organizing camps, building and leading a team, planning, but above all a personal and deep relationship with God. If there were periods when I did not start the day with prayer, then nothing at work went well. Only in close cooperation with God, my spiritual director, youth chaplain, and support team did I see fruit. This project is the greatest gift of my life because it allowed me to get to know God, myself, my identity, and

my talents, and to discover how important it is to protect my family and not to put work and service first. Including realizing that service in the Church is not the same as a relationship with God. God should always come first, time with Him, then myself, my family, and only then work, which in this case is also service. I saw it as a big problem in the lives of other servants as well. I am very grateful for this fantastic opportunity to experience so many changes in the lives of young people, where they gave their lives to Jesus, changed beyond recognition, found their vocations, and realized their talents, and how special and uniquely created they are.

### **Quantitative questions:**

#### **How big was the area of the project? (in sqkm)**

Riga Archdiocese area, 23,587 km<sup>2</sup>

now

Latvia territory 64,589 km<sup>2</sup>

#### **How many people worked on the project? (employees and volunteers)**

One paid job vacancy was sponsored. Youth chaplain Pēteris Skudra was another support person during the project. At the end of the project, a team of about 20 young people and youth leaders has been formed, who do their work voluntarily.

#### **How many people did you reach?**

During the project time, approximately 870 people:

- 120 meetings and interviews were conducted with representatives of various fields related to youth work.
- Participation in two priest conferences, where approximately 40 priests participated in each.
- Participation in 2 catechists' seminars, where an average of 35 catechists participated.
- Three meetings of catholic youth organizations, each attended by around 20 participants.
- Group meetings:
  - a. Meeting of family organizations with 30 representatives;
  - b. Meeting of a student group with 6 representatives.
  - c. Working group on questions of the theology of the Body, meetings throughout the year, 4 representatives participate.
- Training for digital work with young people in parishes, a total of 35 participants took part.
- Hackathons, in which about 40 young people participated in total.
- Project Rise Up, where 30 young people met regularly over a period of 6 months.
- Diocese days during the Covid period, around 30 young people, and Diocese days in November 2022, a total of 60 young people.
- Youth Alpha, 25 participants met in a period of 3 months.
- Oasis Youth Camps held (Usually 4 times per year, because of Covid in the year 2021 only 1 time):

- Oasis Summer Camp 2021, 50 youth and 15 team members,
  - Summer 2022: 50 youth and 20 team members,
  - Fall 2022: 35 young people and 15 team members,
  - winter 2022: 40 young people and 25 team members.
- Training of young leaders, Leaders DNA: 25 participants.
  - Meeting and fellowship of youth leaders for 3 days: 29 participants.
  - Silence retreat of youth leaders: 24 participants.
  - Christmas fellowship event for youth leaders: 40 participants.
  - World Youth Day team, 25 young people, regular meetings and prayers, for 8 months.
  - Katolis, youth team: regular meetings, 3 youth leaders, one time per week.

### **Which target groups did you reach?**

There were mainly three age groups of young people:

1. From 14 - 18 years old, who were mostly in the Oasis camp and part of the Rise Up project.
2. From 18 - 25 years, youth leaders who serve in churches.
3. From 25 - 35 years of age, former youth leaders, are leaders who are currently ready to pass on their knowledge to the new generation and get involved in prayer groups, help with experience, and mentoring.