

# THE CYO STORY

In the Depression Years of the 1930's a ray of light burst forth illuminating a need for the development of leisure time activities for our youth. The sounds of cheering crowds, the singing of camp songs, the music from a parish hall announcing a hi-club dance and the celebration of the Eucharist among a youth group began to touch the lives of young people through the start of the Catholic Youth Organization.

Pope Pius XI, in his encyclical on the Christian Education of Youth stressed that recreational and social activities were an important part of the overall education of young people. He called for us to rise and share our values and faith experiences with wisdom and love to the young people. After two years of study, In December, 1937 Archbishop Joseph Schrembs appointed Reverend James O'Brien as Diocesan Director of the Catholic Youth Organization. The CYO was designed as a youth serving agency to organize and coordinate all youth activities. Archbishop Schrembs stated that spiritual development is the primary objective of CYO. We are to lead youth to a better understanding and appreciation of our faith, to practice virtue and to encourage the youth to receive the Sacraments.

In the early 1940's the four-fold program of CYO, Social – Spiritual – Cultural – Physical, began to fully develop through the development of the Knights of the Alter, Cayomaw Club, Hi-Club, and CYO Camp and Athletic programs. In the 1950's, under the direction of Msg. Thomas C. Corrigan the CYO grew to include young adult programs for those that lost contact with the Church during World War II and the Korean War. During this time there were over 5,000 boys and girls involved in CYO athletics and over 1,500 CYO summer campers. Committees of lay volunteers also began to organize programs in Boy Scouts, Girls Scouts, a National Catholic Youth Week, a One Act Play Festival and the Knights of the Alter Holy Hour.

In the 1960's and 1970's Reverend James P. O'Donnell fostered the development of the "Youth Happening", the AMEN Program, the Walk for Hunger in Greater Cleveland, SEARCH Program, and the Coaches Certification Program. In 1976, with Dan Ferrazza as Diocesan Director, A Vision of Youth Ministry was published. In this document the United States Catholic Conference stated that "No one aspect of youth ministry is independent of others; they are all interdependent elements of a unified total vision...the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person. We are still guided by this vision today.

In the 1980's and 1990's Bishop Anthony Pilla invited us to join with him in accepting not only the challenge but also the HOPE who is Jesus. He has been a guiding hand along the journey of developing Church in the Youth and Young Adults of Cleveland. During this time there has been a re-commitment to the early dreams of CYO, to enable young people to know Jesus. In May 1997 the CYO Philosophy and rules were organized into the present Charter & By-laws that are reaffirmed by member parishes each time they resubmit their Membership Agreement. Our philosophy captures the heart of our athletic programs – Christ – Participation – Team – Teaching!

The tradition of CYO continues today. In 2002, over 15,000 young people participated in our Youth and Young Adult Ministry programs, over 29,000 participated in our Cleveland CYO Athletic programs, over 7,400 campers attended our CYO Camp Programs. Our constant challenge remains the building of community and shared philosophy among the many volunteers that give the CYO the energy to grow. Today, volunteers in CYO programs give their time and energy with the same enthusiasm as those in the 1930's. Working together we will continue to help young people be more Christ-like in the way they live and promote participation and sportsmanship among all those involved in CYO.