

# Youth for Christ NZ - INCEDO

## JOURNEY OF CHANGE

**Background.** NZ Youth for Christ began in the late 40's after WW2. It quickly connected with YFC programmes around the world, and became a key part of the YFC International network.

Initially YFCNZ was a collection of local committees running rallies, Bible studies and camps, throughout NZ.

In the late 60's through to the late 80's, YFC burgeoned with talented and charismatic leadership - developing High School clubs; work with delinquent young people; touring music /drama teams; large scale Rallies; concerts; camps; a Nationwide Talent Quest; radio and TV programmes, and clubs for 11-13 year olds.

Underpinning this growth was the development of a national structure of National Council, National Board and Director, local Boards and Directors, multi-level staff, and volunteers. At its peak it operated in 17 regional centres, had a full-time/part-time staff of over 120, and boasted around 1000 volunteers. YFC saw itself, and was seen by the general public, as a well organised and highly successful evangelical christian youth organisation.

**The Problems.** During the 90's there was below-the-surface tension between the National Office and local centres. Some felt National Office didn't fully understand, or communicate well with, grassroots workers. Decisions made at National Council were often ignored by local centre staff, protected by their own Boards. While YFC talked of being a nationwide organisation there was as much competition as there was co-operation. A change in leadership, with the stepping down of YFC's highest profile National Director, led to a period of attempted change during the 90's.

**Social Change.** Like many Western countries NZ has faced the full impact of post-modernism, secularism, immigration and resulting pluralism, and the challenge to Christianity's role in society. The church has not responded well and is generally viewed as narrow, judgemental, and irrelevant.

Young people, especially in their 20's have abandoned Christianity. Evangelism, rooted in 50's theology and practise, has proved increasingly ineffectual, even when YFC updated it with more contemporary expressions.

Between 1998 and 2002, YFC's National Director provoked discussion on the many issues facing YFC in a changing culture.

**2003** A paper based on Jim Collins “Good to Great” prompted National Council to consider substantial change. 6 months later, a conference of local Directors debated the “brutal facts” of YFC:

- increasing distance from secular youth
- an aging down of programmes, corresponding with older youth dropping out
- poor stewardship of resources
- declining numbers, and quality of discipleship of volunteers
- disconnectedness within the organisation
- poor staff development
- lack of good research into youth culture
- difficulty in making pro-active decisions

The Conference selected a Task Force that eventually brought a recommendation for structural and strategic change, to the following National Council.

**March 04** National Council accepted the Task Force recommendation and voted almost unanimously that the National Board would make a binding decision, within the intent of the report, by the end of the year.

The Board established 3 groups to do more research:

1. A staff research group, that visited over 50 ministries worldwide, read numerous books and articles, and dialogued with ministry staff.
2. Two Consultants who toured NZ YFC centres, interviewing 80% of staff, volunteers, and Board members.
3. A Board sub-committee that met separately to review findings and discuss options.

Eventually it became clear the choice was primarily between becoming a much more structured, strategic, professional christian youth organisation or a nationwide mission community/ ‘order’.

**October 04** The National Board made the decision that YFC would become a mission community, defined by a new mission statement. Where previously it had emphasised a desire to reach all young people and disciple them into the church, it now stated:

***“We are committed followers of Jesus  
inviting all young people  
to join our faith adventure”***

This signalled a commitment to pursue health and authenticity on our faith

journey (the “being”) as a first step to engaging with youth culture (the “doing”)

We believed good mission practise was as essential in our own culture, as it would be on overseas cross-cultural mission.

We also determined the mission would be grounded on **6 values**:

1. **JESUS CENTRED** - we would be committed to following and imitating Jesus
2. **MISSION THRO’ SERVICE** - our mission activity would be marked by serving our youth communities
3. **PEOPLE FOCUSED** - we would put people before programmes
4. **PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS** - there would be places for all to express their gifts and calling.
5. **GENEROSITY** - we would become known for our willingness to give
6. **CREATIVITY** - we would honour a creative God with the best of our talent

A number of practices were implemented to help develop these values. The practices could be changed and adapted but the values would stay the same.

Structurally we changed from 15 local centres with Boards and Director, to one National Board, a Mission Leadership Team (MLT) for the whole country, and mission “bases”. We adopted Team Leadership as a model, in place of single Directorships.

**The Decision** was announced to local Directors, and 3 senior workers were appointed as the MLT and charged with processing the change. Kotters “Transforming Organisations” was a guiding document for the process.

**2005** the process got underway in earnest, but quickly revealed a number of things:

- \* Some centre directors had not read the research information circulated to them.
- \* Many had not passed it on to staff, volunteers, and Board members.
- \* Not many had dialogued or grappled with, the implications of the proposed changes
- \* A number of local Board members were reluctant to give up their positions

Not surprisingly, responses to the change process were varied - from enthusiastic acceptance, through to active opposition. Furthermore, it became obvious to the MLT that the changes would have to be a ‘work in progress’. Within the broad outlines of the change document, detail would need to be constantly refined and adapted. This produced frustration for some who felt the changes headed into territory not specified in the initial discussions and reports.

**The Damage!** It was understood that the change would mean our more

professional and Government funded projects would need to move out of YFC, but it also became clear some YFC workers would not accept the changes. They simply were not on the same page. The MLT committed to enabling such projects and workers to leave and establish themselves in separate organisations. Many projects were “handed over”. The process took about 2 years and resulted in YFC being about 40% of its original size.

This was an unwanted, but acceptable and necessary outcome. We had determined that future evaluations of the mission would be based not on our size, but on how we reflected the 6 values. This has been a crucial step in freeing us from our past success.

**2007** The 3 original MLT members progressively handed over the reins to a younger team, but have continued as workers in the mission. The core of the mission is now “members”, who commit to the values and practices, and gather a number of times during the year, one of which is to affirm the membership of the MLT (operational leadership) and the Board (governance). Membership of the Board is also limited to members. That means Board members must be committed to values and practices, and active in the mission.

The MLT are empowered to make decisions quickly as and when they see fit.

The membership has settled at around 45. People who get involved in helping the mission at a variety of levels are free to explore membership however this is not a major goal.

**Name Change** Mid 2007 we changed the name from Youth for Christ to “Incedo” (loosely based on a Latin word meaning to move ahead...to go). While this fits where we are as a mission, the name deliberately has no major meaning - so that we can build Incedo into what we believe it should be, rather than being bound to a specific meaning.

**2008** We now feel that we have dealt to the major aspects of the change process, although we believe we will continue refining and adapting as a mission

Next steps may include:

- 1 Exploring ways to connect members more often and more meaningfully
- 2 Refining the DNA of Incedo and finding ways to embed it more deeply in ourselves as members
- 3 Communicating the purpose and values of Incedo to people outside of the mission