



St Carlo Acutis Association

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A Personal Testimony

My name is Ray, and this is the story of how our youth group began, how it changed my life, and how it has grown into what is now the Carlo Acutis Association.

If you had told me a few years ago that I would be helping to run a youth group, let alone supporting other parishes to start their own, I never would have believed you. I had no background in youth ministry. No training. No plan.



What I did have was a simple nudge from the Holy Spirit and the willingness to say yes.

How It All Began

It began at Our Lady of the Wayside, where we had no youth group and nothing in place for the young people who came to Mass each week with their families. There was no space for them to grow in faith, make friends or feel part of parish life. It weighed heavily on my heart.

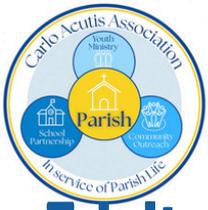
After a long period of prayer, I asked the Lord to use me however He wished. The answer was clear and simple. **Start a youth group.**

I went to our parish priest, Father Andrew, and shared what I felt called to do. He welcomed it immediately and encouraged me with real enthusiasm. He knew this was something the parish needed, and he knew I was willing to try, even if I did not yet know how.

When Father asked if I would take this forward, I felt a mixture of panic and excitement. I had every reason to say no. I had work, responsibilities and no experience of running a youth group. **But something in me knew I needed to say yes.** That yes was the beginning of everything that followed.



Looking back, that yes changed everything.



The Trinity Takes Shape: Parish, School, Community

Without planning it, the three pillars that would later define the Carlo Acutis Association were already emerging.

Church

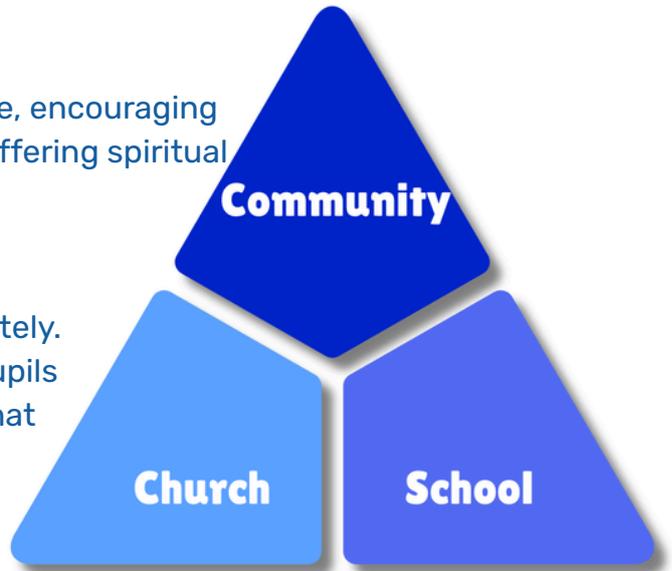
Father Andrew supported the mission from day one, encouraging volunteers, making announcements at Mass and offering spiritual direction.

School

Local catholic schools embraced the idea immediately. Headteachers promoted the group, encouraged pupils and created a bridge between school and parish that opened the door for families.

Community

Parishioners came forward with time, energy and willingness. Some helped with safeguarding, some with games, some simply welcomed the young people with warmth and encouragement.



This Trinity of church, school and community became the blueprint for everything that followed

The Gift of Mentorship

God provided guidance when it was most needed.

Marie, an experienced youth minister of more than 10 years, became a mentor from the very first retreat. Her experience, calm accompaniment and steady wisdom helped shape the group during its early weeks and still guides it today.

Father Andrew also remained a spiritual mentor, grounding the group in prayer, faith and encouragement.





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The First Leaders Step Forward

Teri Moriani, who was one of the original leaders at Our Lady of the Wayside, often said that in the last year of her life, the youth group gave her renewed meaning and hope.

Two young adult brothers, **Dan** and **Ben**, had been asked by their parish priest at Olton Friary, Father Bijou, for nearly a year to start a youth group. They wanted to help, but simply did not know where to begin.

When Ray's group launched their first summer youth event at Olton Friary, Dan and Ben joined in. **72 young people attended that event, far more than anyone expected.** Dan and Ben found themselves naturally stepping into leadership, supported, accompanied and guided by others.

Their story highlights a core truth in youth ministry. **Many parishioners feel called, but do not know what to do or where to start. The right support can unlock their gifts.** This is exactly where the CAA will help parishes.

Their example would later inspire the CAA principle of "experienced leaders walking with those just beginning"

A New Home and Rapid Growth

With attendance rising every week, Our Lady of the Wayside could no longer hold the numbers. Olton Friary offered its space and became the home of the senior youth group.

Soon, the cluster group grew to include young people from:

- Our Lady of the Wayside
- St Augustine's
- Olton Friary

Within months, **more than 80 young people** were attending weekly sessions. Discussions ranged from the Rosary to modern ethical issues.

Prayer became meaningful. Friendships strengthened. Young people who were shy became leaders. Mass attendance grew. And faith felt alive again.

The **junior group**, led by Maeve, flourished instantly, with around thirty children attending each week. Her success demonstrated what happens when the Trinity model is working well and when parish, school and community support each other fully.





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The Moment God Made the Mission Clear

One evening, a mother travelled twenty one miles from Quinton with her daughter. Two buses. Three hours of travel. Just for one youth session.

When she was asked why, her answer was simple:
"There is nothing like this near us, and my daughter needs it."

That moment made it clear.
This was not only a parish initiative.
Not even a cluster project.
It was a call to help other parishes build what had been built in Solihull.

Families should not have to travel across Birmingham to find community, friendship and faith for their children.

The Seeds of the Carlo Acutis Association

Through these early successes, and through many lessons learned along the way, a pattern emerged:

- Parishes wanted youth groups
- Volunteers wanted to serve
- Schools wanted to support
- Families needed safe, faith filled spaces

But many did not know where to start

The Solihull experience showed what was possible and revealed a model that worked. One built on prayer, safeguarding, friendship and accompaniment

This is how the Carlo Acutis Association was born. So that no parish has to start alone. So that volunteers can receive the guidance Ray wished he had. So that every young person can have a place to belong.



So that St Carlo's words, "The Eucharist is my highway to Heaven," can echo in every parish.