

What is Youth Ministry?

Quite simply, youth ministry is all the ways the parish community serves young people and their families, and equips them to live as Catholic Christians. Simple, but not easy. To give focus and direction to youth ministry, the Catholic Bishops published the document, *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* (USCC, 1997). Here's a brief overview of our contemporary approach to youth ministry

Goals of Youth Ministry

Youth ministry seeks to help young people grow and develop in their faith in three distinct ways:

Goal 1: To empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today.

We know that young people are seeking. Youth seek to find the adventure of their lifetime. They look for a way to contribute something important to the world. They look for a cause to belong to, a cause to throw their life into. As a faith community, we offer young people the challenge of life as a disciple of Jesus Christ. This effort includes...

- providing a spiritually challenging and world shaping vision for life
- evangelizing youth, drawing youth into personal relationship with Jesus Christ
- calling youth to discipleship
- providing opportunities for youth to join in service, ministry and leadership
- providing catechesis for youth
- helping youth to explore their vocation

Goal 2: To draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission, and work of the faith community.

We know that young people are striving to be part of a community. They long to belong to others. They want to feel connected to people with whom they will feel safe. As a church, we offer young people community. We help them to become more connected in their own families, in our parishes and in the wider community.

Renewing the Vision identifies four important faith communities for young people: the family, the parish, the Catholic school, and the youth-serving organization. We help youth connect to a network of support in their various communities. This effort includes...

- supporting families of youth by providing resources, programs and information
- integrating youth into the life of the parish community

- promoting belonging in the Catholic school community
- building participation in youth-serving organizations

Goal 3: To foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person.

We know that young people are growing. This time in their life brings dramatic physical, social, intellectual and spiritual changes. As the body of Christ, we offer youth a place to grow. We offer experiences and opportunities for youth to grow in positive ways, to learn their faith and use their gifts in service to others. As a community, we use our creativity and resources to respond to youth that are seeking, striving and growing. We foster this growth through our active engagement of youth in the life of our communities. We seek to...

- support the development of healthy, competent, caring, and faith-filled youth
- address their unique developmental, social and religious needs
- foster positive adolescent development
- promote Catholic identity
- address the obstacles and challenges to healthy development

A Comprehensive Approach

Youth ministry works toward these three goals by sponsoring programs and activities in eight distinct areas of ministry called components. Briefly, these components are:



Advocacy: *interpreting* the needs of youth and their families, especially the social problems facing them and *acting* with or on behalf of youth and their families for a change in the systems (policies, procedures, programs) which create or contribute to the social problems; *giving* young people a voice and *empowering* them to address the social problems that they face.



Catechesis: *sponsoring* youth toward maturity in Catholic Christian faith as a living reality through the kind of teaching and learning that emphasizes understanding, reflection, and transformation; *fostering* in youth a communal identity as Catholic Christians within the intergenerational community of faith *and* helping them to develop their own personal faith identity (*The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis*).



for social interaction and meaningful participation in the life of the church and civic community.

Community Life: *creating* an environment which nurtures meaningful relationships among youth and between youth and adults characterized by Gospel values (e.g., acceptance of all people, trust, respect, cooperation, honesty, taking responsibility, willingness to serve); *helping* young people feel like a valued part of the church community; *providing* opportunities



nourished. Evangelization is the energizing core of all the components of youth ministry (*The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization*).

Evangelization: *proclaiming* through word and witness the Good News of the Gospel to youth who have not yet heard or seen it and *inviting* them into a relationship with Jesus Christ and the community of believers; *ongoing witness* of the faith community as it attempts to live out the Gospel with such authenticity that the faith of all the members is sustained and



serve those in need, to pursue peace, and to defend the life, dignity, and rights of all people; *infusing* the concepts of justice and peace into all youth ministry efforts.

Justice and Service: *guiding* young people in the development of a social consciousness and a commitment to a life of justice and service grounded in their faith in Jesus Christ, in the scriptures and in Catholic social teaching; *empowering* young people (and their families) to work for justice by concrete efforts to address the causes of human suffering, to



Leadership Development: *recruiting, training,* and *supporting* youth and adult leaders in youth ministry; *empowering* youth for leadership and ministry with their peers, in their schools, and in the church and civic community; *developing* a leadership team of youth and adults to organize and coordinate a ministry with youth; *partnering* with parents and families in promoting positive youth development and faith growth.



Pastoral Care: *promoting* positive youth and family development through a variety of preventive strategies (e.g., developing life skills and parenting skills); *caring* for youth and families in crisis through support, counseling, and referral to appropriate community agencies; and *providing* guidance as youth face life decisions and make moral choices.



Prayer and Worship: *assisting* young people in deepening their relationship with Jesus through spiritual development and a personal prayer life; *providing* a variety of communal prayer and worship experiences with youth to deepen and celebrate their relationship with Jesus in a caring Christian community; *involving* young people in the sacramental life of the Church.

These eight components of youth ministry can be programmed in four different ways: with youth, with youth and families, with the parish community, and in collaboration with the civic community. A vibrant youth ministry takes advantage of each of these four program settings.

Youth programming involves organizing a variety of activities around the specific developmental and social needs of young people, involving youth and adult leaders in program planning and implementation.

Family ministry involves programs and activities geared to incorporating a family perspective in all youth ministry programming; in developing specific programs and activities for parents, for youth and parents, and for the whole family; and for supporting and strengthening in-home family life.

Involvement in Church life offers young people opportunities to develop a sense of belonging and loyalty to the community; to feel like valued members of the community, and to take responsibility as leaders in parish-wide programs, such as liturgical ministries, service ministries, educational ministries, and community/social events.

Collaboration with the civic community provides a way for youth ministry to utilize community-wide resources and activities, and to plan joint activities, programs, and meetings with the different youth-serving organizations in the community (churches, schools, scouting programs, youth agencies).

Programs and activities in each of these four program settings can be organized as gathered programs or non-gathered programs (small group or individual):

Gathered Programs focus on participation in organized, assembled programs for youth, families, parish community, or civic community (e.g., parish events, intergenerational programs, youth meetings, social events, trips, retreats).

Non-Gathered Programs include programs that provide maximum flexibility in addressing specific needs of youth and/or families using a variety of ***Small Group*** and ***Individualized*** approaches (e.g. home-based activities and resources, community service, spiritual direction, mentoring, independent learning, small group Bible study).

Conclusion

That's a brief overview of what we, together, are trying to accomplish in youth ministry. It's quite a challenge, but when you have quality leaders, great programs, and a parish community coming together on behalf of its young people, it becomes much easier.