

My ABCs of Youth Ministry What I've learned in 43 yrs. by Tony Bellizzi

Accompany- More than teachers, young people need guides, witnesses. "We walk beside" is the way we proceed with all aspects of ministry.

Animate- Every youth ministry needs animators, with charisma, energy, ease with relating with and understanding youth, who can make something happen when they have gathered. Find and use other effective, Christ-centered animators to complement what you and your staff do on a regular basis.

Active- Young people, especially guys need to be able to move. Lengthy sit still periods of time kill.

Be present- So many times the real, the most important ministry happens in a God-moment when the Holy Spirit moves in a way you never saw coming. If you are distracted by living in the past, or anxious about something in the future you will never be able to see and be an instrument for what God wants to do in the present moment in the life of a young person.

Community- Young people do not need youth programs, clubs, or even groups. They need to experience being part of a Youth community of their church community.

Communication- Effective communication is key for your team, and teens, Work on becoming a better listener. Know how to facilitate the communication of a large and small group. Enforce a respectful manner of communication of feelings and needs among the youth community.

Discussion- Never let a teen go home without having been offered the opportunity to speak. Small groups are crucial to providing this. They should be part of youth ministry events regularly if not weekly, and they must be facilitated by leaders who know how to insure that there is an atmosphere of respect, each has a chance to speak and be heard, and something meaningful actually occurs.

Delegate- You can't do it all. Empower and train teens and staff to do some of the ministry work so that you can see and be freed to take care of the big picture including the Holy Spirit moments.

Eucharist- Jesus most powerfully brings us to himself through Himself. Spend time in His presence, and receive His true presence as much as possible.

Eat- Everyone loves to, and needs to eat, and people of all ages bond when they eat together. As many opportunities to do this is important. As much as possible, avoid serving mass produced food. Homemade food prepared with love is always the best.

Evaluate- Constantly look at and discuss with your leaders how things are going, but never allow an overly critical process to ensue or anybody to be hurt personally

Faith- Know your religion and provide teens with knowledge of what we believe, and how it effects their daily lives.

Family- Your youth community should always feel like coming home to family. Also learn about and involve the parents and families of teens. Support them, pray for them and keep open lines of communication.

God is good all the time- Remember that God is working in your life, your ministry and the lives of your teens, even and especially if may not seem like it. He is good even when it may not feel good.

Gifts- The main purpose of the teen years is for them to discover what God made them good at and explore what He made them for. Youth ministry should be a big part of that by offering opportunities for the young people to see themselves as gifts, to discover gifts they have not yet seen, to develop those gifts and become motivated to and actually share their God-given talents.

Humor- A sense of humor is a youth ministers most important tool and gift. Use it, and if you don't have it include other who do and bring in the humor of the word through comedy films, cartoons, funny stories. Young people, all people, like to laugh and need more joy in their lives.

Integrity- Always be self-examining to make sure that you are on the path of congruence between your words and deeds. Don't be a perfectionist, but be striving to be a real, transparent, and honest spiritual mentor and leader.

Jesus- He belongs in one place: the center, the center of our hearts, our lives, our families, our youth ministry. Period. He loves you and he loves your youth community. Let Him love you, shape your life and ministry accordingly, trust all to him, especially when it seems hopeless.

Keep it real- Youth know when you are being fake, so never pretend. Use language and stories that let them know you understand them and their lives. Don't get caught doing an activity that you don't personally enjoy or see the value of. You will never be able to engage them if it doesn't work for you.

Kindness- Strive every day to do and say as many kind things as possible. Teens and all people really, do not remember our words. They remember the kindnesses that were shown to them.

Love- This is what you are to do period. Remember that love is not an emotion, it is action, working as hard for the good of another as you would for yourself. Love is the measure of all you do in ministry. You can create and put on the most clever and exciting youth ministry night, but if there was no love, it was all for nothing. Love your staff and teens, and provide them with opportunities to demonstrate their love for each other. Remember that we cannot love and judge at the same time.

Leaders- Empower the young to lead. Affirm, train, and provide tools for your teen, young adult, and adult leaders. They must be trained in providing a safe environment for the young. Meet regularly.

Music- has many uses: to connect to current youth culture, to send an inspirational message, to energize, to help reflection.

No one left out- always be sensitive to the young person who arrives or sits alone, and might need a little attention and encouragement to open up and become comfortable. Never allow cliques to dominate.

Openness- let all teens must feel safe and welcome in your presence and in your group. No one should ever be hurt by cruelty or rejection when they are part of God's family through your ministry. Closed-minded, judgmental staff are not needed. Acts of intolerance and cruelty must be addressed.

Outreach- Never be satisfied with who is already coming. Your teens, staff, and yourself should always be looking for who can be invited to be a part of the youth ministry family.

Prayer- There is no real youth ministry without Christ and so our prayerful contact with him is crucial and central. Nurture your own prayer life. Nothing will ever be more important than your prayer for your teens and staff. Provide a variety of prayer focuses, experiences and styles so young people will understand that prayer is not simply presenting God with a list of your needs.

Quiet- With the hectic, mesmerizing pace of life, one of the greatest gifts you can give youth is some quiet time to put aside infinite distractions, social media chatter, and be still so they can experience the voice of God in their souls and learn to hear how and when He speaks to them.

Repent- None of us are perfect. Regularly examine your conscience and confess your sins. Be a humble servant, aware of your need for God, never allowing yourself to slip into perfectionism.

Retreats- Simply: more spiritual growth will occur for your teens on one retreat weekend than in 25 weekly meetings. Retreats are a tremendous amount of work, and challenging to carry out, but worth every bit of it. Jesus can do his work most effectively in a setting of Christian community, people living together for an extended period of time in a space where He has been placed at the center.

Service- Youth ministry MUST include Christian service, and seen by the teens as integral to what being a follower of Jesus is all about. Provide a variety of opportunities, since not every service

Skits- They are a fun and effective way of developing empathy and understanding. There is also a bonding that occurs when teens work together to create and perform them.

Sex- Sexuality is a key part of teens lives. Responsible youth ministries use sensitive, informative methods and presentations to address teen sexual temptations, perspectives, and moral issues. Not addressing sexuality tells teens it's either not important, or the beliefs and practices of dominant and youth culture are acceptable to their religion, or you lack the courage to keep it real with them.

Trips- Fun, and adventurous excursions help young people experience that their life with God is not separate from the other experiences and aspects of life. People who have fun together bond together.

United- Provide opportunities for the youth to come together for a common cause, and where their diversity within the unity of the Body of Christ can be experienced and celebrated.

Video- Film is a powerful way of telling stories and teaching about life and faith. Use films and videos frequently and in a variety of creative ways.

World- Broaden the awareness and the lives of the young. Bring the outside world into your ministry, and find ways to involve teens in service and solidarity with those who struggle and suffer.

We need you- Too many young people feel that they don't matter. Their church plods on whether their young people are with them or not, sending the message to the young that they are not crucial. Work with parish staffs to give young people concrete ways to make a difference in their local church.

Xample- Never ask young people to do what you yourself do not
Youth Center Youth ministries thrive when their parish is willing to give the youth a space they can call their own. Teens get it that they really do belong.

Zzz- Get enough sleep. Really. Youth ministry is a great challenge, and you have to be on your game. No one needs a half-dead, exhausted, burned out youth minister. Learn how to take mini-vacations. Do what give you joy, outside your ministry. Spend time with family and friends.