

ELEVEN STEPS IN DEVELOPING A COMPREHENSIVE YOUTH MINISTRY PROGRAM

1. Get authorization. The initial step in planning is to ensure the support and endorsement of the parish leadership. The pastor and the parish council must offer their encouragement and support in order to reflect parish ownership of the program. This provides empowerment to the coordinator or the team responsible for youth ministry. To be empowered is to receive funds and resources, and act on behalf of the parish in working with the young people. Clear decisions need to be made about the scope of the authority and the lines of accountability between the planning team and the parish leadership.

2. Get the right people together. Establishing an overall planning team or commission of people to develop youth ministry is important. A "lone Ranger" approach quickly results in frustration and burnout. A team effort provides support and greater resources. If a parish has a coordinator for youth ministry, that person can best serve as the overall team coordinator. Some parishes may give a professional parish staff person - such as the director of religious education or the pastoral associate - the additional role of youth ministry coordinator. In many cases, though, the coordinator will be a volunteer.

The overall team should be comprised of people who are interested in and comfortable with young people. They may be persons * already involved in parish religious education programs, sports, scouting, or other youth activities and organizations. They may be young adults, parents, or selected young people.

The overall team will have three important tasks:

- a. overall planning, consultation, and evaluation
- b. implementation and direct service
- c. advocacy and support

Develop job or role descriptions for each task. If people are aware of the scope of the task and the expectations, they are more likely to accept the role. Individuals on the team may choose to be involved in one or more tasks depending on their interests, skills, and time commitments.

3. Establish your goals for youth ministry. The first task of the overall planning team is to establish general goals for youth ministry. The members of the team should become familiar with A vision of Youth Ministry, The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis: Maturing in Faith and The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization. This represents the experience & thinking of youth ministers over the past two decades. However, it is important that the directions in the documents be adapted to each particular parish with its particular character. The goals should reflect the parish mission statement and the specific situation and condition of the young people in that parish. The following questions can be helpful in bringing the best of thinking about youth ministry to bear on each particular situation:

What is youth ministry?

What is the parish's mission statement?

How would youth ministry be involved in carrying out this mission?

What is the history of youth ministry in our parish?

What has happened in the past regarding young people?

What was the outcome?

What is now happening for the young people in our parish?

How is it going?

Who are the adults involved?

Who are the young people involved?

Goals are usually written annually, and it is common for goals to be rather fluid and flexible throughout the planning stages, especially during the first year of a youth ministry program.

4. Identify your resources. In the early stages of planning, the overall planning team should identify the available resources. What funds are available from the parish budget or other sources of revenue? What personnel (salaried or volunteer) are already available? What facilities will be available for the youth ministry events?

When beginning youth ministry in a parish, it may be necessary to negotiate with the pastor and the parish council about setting aside the necessary resources for youth ministry programming.

5. Conduct a needs assessment. An effective way of determining the needs of the young people in the parish is through a needs assessment survey or questionnaire. The assessment can be given to a large group gathered for a parish meeting, or it can be used to gather information through a phone survey. A parish can gather valuable information from not only parents, adult leaders of parish organizations, And leaders from the local community, but also parish young people themselves.

6. Generate event and activity Ideas. Once the planning team has set its goals within the philosophy of youth ministry, identified its resources, and conducted a needs assessment, the next step is to brainstorm ideas for possible events and activities that respond to the philosophy, resources and needs that have been determined. Using the eight components of youth ministry as a guide, a planning team can brainstorm possible events, activities, or opportunities for youth ministry and group them according to the components of youth ministry.

7. Match your ideas with the goals, needs, and resources. Once you have identified possible events and activities for the youth in your parish, take the time to review those ideas in light of the goals you originally set, the resources that you have available, and the needs identified in the assessments. Here are some key questions to answer:

- Will the events and activities on the list accomplish the goals set for the program?
- Will the needs of the parish and the youth be served by the programming considered?
- Do you need more resources, such as money, volunteers, or space?
- Have you planned ways to recruit other adults to serve as volunteers in the parish youth ministry?
- How will you keep the parish council, pastor, and parish informed of your work?

8. Set a calendar. As you begin to set the dates for the events and activities you have chosen for the coming year, you should have the following in front of you:

- the parish calendar
- local high school calendars indicating graduations, dances, sports events, etc.
- the calendar of the diocesan office of youth ministry community calendars showing dates of the regular meetings of the youth organizations

Watch for conflicts in setting dates and be conscious of not making excessive demands for the young people's time. Realize that youth are often involved in several different arenas, such as school, family, and community. Do not try to do too much, too soon. Build slowly and, where possible, utilize existing events and activities by making them parish youth activities.

Hold regular meetings of the overall planning team in order to provide support and assessment of the specific events and activities as they take place during the year.

9. Assign leaders and responsibilities. When the dates have been chosen, each activity should be assigned a leader. Ideally, the coordinator of youth ministry should not be the leader for any event, though the coordinator will check to make sure things get accomplished and supports the activity leaders. A list of responsibilities, persons responsible, and time lines should be kept by the activity leader.

10. Develop an organizational structure and organizational chart. Shaping the overall organization follows the assignment of events, tasks, and leaders. The organizational chart should reveal answers to these basic questions:

- Who is responsible for what and when?
- Who is accountable to whom and how?

11. Plan for evaluation. Planning youth ministry is not complete until the planning team evaluates the overall youth ministry effort. Planning is not an exact science and there will always be a need for evaluation. As conditions change, so will the resources and needs of the parish. Consequently, overall planning is a process that ends with evaluation, which in turn is the starting point for the next planning cycle. Evaluation can be accomplished through personal interviews, collating evaluations from the participants of particular programs, and checking the events against the original goals set for the youth ministry program.