

Effective Youth Ministry in Catholic Parishes

Youth ministry thrives with the support of the whole parish community.

- » Youth feel at home and are genuinely known and liked
- » Youth are integrated into the full life of the parish
- » Youth share in leadership and decision making in the parish; youth also have opportunities to witness to their faith with peers, children, and adults
- » The involvement of youth is encouraged and affirmed.
- » Parish staff and leadership are supportive of youth ministry and youth involvement.

In parishes with effective youth ministry, the parish community understands youth ministry.

- » Parishioners know that your ministry is everyone's responsibility.
- » The community desires a youth ministry that is infused into parish life.

Some aims of Youth Ministry are achieved within the ministries of the parish, while others are achieved within a youth peer community.

Pastor support for youth ministry is crucial. There are different ways to be supportive: some pastors work side by side with other leaders in youth ministry, other pastors are present to youth, but work to support and empower the Coordinator of Youth Ministry and team.

In parishes with effective youth ministry, the parish staff and leaders support each other and work collaboratively. The boundaries between ministries are permeable.

QUALITIES AND DIMENSIONS OF EFFECTIVE YOUTH MINISTRY

Effective youth ministry responds to the real lives, needs and interests of youth.

- » Youth feel like they matter.
- » Ministry is innovative and dynamic.
- » There is not one model - in these parishes there is a relational pattern of knowing youth, innovating and changing in order to be responsive.

Hospitality and relationship building are foundational to effective youth ministry.

- » Young people are welcomed and accepted.
- » Extending personal invitations, providing warm groups is intentional and ongoing.
- » Web of relationships: youth with youth, youth with adults, parish community with youth, youth in their families.

Effective youth ministry has a variety of ways for youth to be involved.

- » Boundaries between ministries are permeable.
- » Ministry is multifaceted.
- » There are variety of levels of participation among youth and their families.

In parishes with effective youth ministry, youth are active in making youth ministry happen (youth are not passive receivers of ministry.)

- » Youth have ownership of youth ministry efforts.
- » Youth share leadership in programs and visioning.
- » Youth witness to their faith with their peers.
- » Leading programs helps youth grow in their own faith.

20 Recommendations for Developing Effective Parish Youth Ministry

1. Assess strengths and areas for your parish to grow in comparison with the research findings.
2. Initiate conversations in your parish about effective youth ministry. Include youth, parents, youth ministry leaders and parish staff.
3. Invest time, prayer and attention to strengthen your parish's "web of relationships": youth with youth, youth with adults, youth ministry leaders with parents, parish community with youth, youth ministry leaders with parish staff and leadership, etc. . .
4. Identify ministries and aspects of parish life in which youth can become involved; work with parish staff and ministry leaders to prepare for youth involvement.
5. Communicate a vision for youth ministry to the parish staff and the parish community.
6. Nurture your spirituality as a youth ministry leader.
7. Take positive steps to strengthen and/or develop your relationship with your pastor.
8. Collaborate with other parish staff and ministries.
9. Network with other coordinators of youth ministry.
10. Utilize local and national resources for developing responsive youth ministry.
11. Develop a youth and adult coordinating team to vision and plan for effective youth ministry.
12. Nurture the skills and the spirituality of the adults who work with youth in your parish.
13. Involve youth in leadership, ministry and teaching roles in youth ministry and in the parish.
14. Evaluate and develop faith formation efforts utilizing the directions in the findings.
15. Develop service experiences utilizing theological reflection.
16. Collaborate with other parish leaders to plan for ways to promote youth participation in liturgy.
17. Invite, prepare and involve youth in liturgical ministries.
18. Create opportunities for extended trips and retreats for youth.
19. Take the time to develop your skills as a coordinator of youth ministry.
20. Create more variety in the youth ministry offerings in your community by complementing your central ministry strategies.

Assessment Questions

Parish / Parish Staff Support for Youth Ministry

- > How well does our parish know and value our youth?
- > How are youth involved in parish life?
- > In what ministries and aspects of parish life could youth become involved?
- > In what ways are youth involved in leadership and decision making in the parish?
- > In what ways do we encourage and affirm youth's involvement in parish life?
- > How well does our parish understand youth ministry?
- > How well does our parish staff understand youth ministry and know about our youth ministry efforts?
- > How well does our parish staff collaborate?
- > In what ways do we make an effort to communicate with and involve our pastor in youth ministry efforts?

Qualities and Dimensions of Effective Youth Ministry

- > How responsive is our youth ministry to the "real lives, needs and interests of youth?"
- > How is our ministry innovative in responding to youth's needs?
- > How are we nurturing the web of relationships in our community? (youth with youth, youth with adults, parish community with youth, youth in their families.)
- > Are there a variety of ways for youth to be involved in our parish and its youth ministry efforts?
- > How are we involving youth in leading youth ministry and promoting ownership of the ministry among the youth?

Specific Programs / Components

- > What do we currently offer youth to promote faith growth and development?
- > How engaging and effective are our faith formation efforts?
- > In our faith formation efforts, in what ways do we begin with and make connections to the real life issues of youth?
- > How are we making adolescent catechesis and faith formation the heart of our youth ministry?
- > How do we provide youth with experiences of service involvement?
- > How well do we connect service experiences with Catholic beliefs and the faith life of young people?
- > How well are we promoting "full, active and conscious participation" of youth in the liturgies of our parish?
- > How are youth involved in the liturgical ministries of our community?
- > Do we provide opportunities for youth to experience extended trips?
- > How do we provide for youth retreat experiences?

As a Coordinator of youth ministry

- > How do I take the time to nurture my spirituality and skills for ministry?
- > How do I develop collaborative relationships with parish staff and leaders?
- > In what ways do I advocate for youth and their involvement in parish life?
- > In what ways do I network with other youth ministers and with the diocese?
- > How do I make youth and adults feel invited, welcome and comfortable?

Adult Volunteers

- > How does our community invite and nurture adults of lively faith to work with youth?
- > How do we provide training and formation for adults who work with youth?