

"New Directions in Catholic Youth Ministry: A National Study of Catholic Youth Ministry Participants"

Conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) and
cosponsored by NCCB and NFCYM, 1996

The CARA study of youth ministry program participants offers the first national data available specifically on Catholic youth ministry. The project was designed to fully reflect the diversity of today's Catholic Church in the United States. The CARA youth ministry program participant survey offers an opportunity to evaluate the current effectiveness of youth ministry programs and suggests areas of special attention for the future.

Major Findings:

- ◇ Young people who participate in youth ministry programs are interested in learning more about their faith and they want to do this as a member of a group
- ◇ Although most participants in Catholic youth ministry programs do not place a strong emphasis on community service, they do strongly value helping others
- ◇ Youth ministry is not a personality-driven ministry or single-issue ministry; rather, young people are attracted by the caring environment and friends they find in youth ministry programs
- ◇ When asked the areas in which youth ministry has most helped them to grow, youth ministry program participants cite areas of faith or moral formation rather than purely social activities
- ◇ Those involved in youth ministry programs take their Catholic identity very seriously and exhibit a deep commitment to the Catholic Church
- ◇ The family plays a key role in faith formation for participants in youth ministry
- ◇ Many participants in youth programs have thought about their lives in service to the Catholic Church but lack specific encouragement from their parents
- ◇ Participants in parish youth ministry report more frequent attendance at worship than their friends, their parents, or other adults significant in their lives
- ◇ Youth ministry makes a deeper impression on participants the longer they participate

Major Recommendations:

- ◇ Single-dimension programs (such as an exclusive sports, catechetical, or other unique focus) are not as helpful and should not be emphasized as much as comprehensive programs which address a range of needs and interests of young people
- ◇ Youth need more opportunities and training in evangelization. And youth ministry needs more of a commitment to reach those youth who are unchurched or not participating in parish programs
- ◇ More effective vocations work will help make parents more comfortable with encouraging religious vocations for their children. This will depend, in part, on bringing parents into dialogue and developing a greater understanding of parent's perspective
- ◇ Catholic youth ministry needs to be more persuasive in helping participants understand that reading the Bible is important for growing in faith and that helping others through community service is as significant as helping people individually
- ◇ Young people must be encouraged to participate over many years

