

Groundbreaking

A How-To Guide for Building a Comprehensive Youth Ministry Program

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Introduction

Welcome to youth ministry! This is truly one of the most exciting and important areas of ministry in our church today. Like all ministries, youth ministry requires intentional planning in order to be effective.

How to Use This Manual

This manual provides a clear process for getting started in developing a parish youth ministry program. *Groundbreaking* is the initial step in building a comprehensive approach to ministry with young people. *Groundbreaking* enables the planning team to:

- a) create a shared vision of youth ministry
- b) develop a program of ministry to, with, by, and for young people
- c) handle the important issues in the field

This manual should serve as a guide in developing your parish program of youth ministry.

Definition

According to the U.S. Bishops' 1997 document, *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry*, the goals of youth ministry “state what it means for the Catholic community to respond to the needs of young people and to involve young people in sharing their unique gifts with the larger community” (RTV, 9). The three primary goals in our ministry to young people are:

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

We know that young people are seeking. They look for ways to contribute something important to the world. They look for a cause to which they can belong. As a faith community, offering young people the challenge of life as a disciple means providing a spiritually challenging world. It means evangelizing youth and drawing them into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Empowering young people means helping them join in service, ministry, and leadership while providing them with meaningful catechesis.

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

Young people are striving to be part of a community. They want to feel connected to other young 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 including school, and other youth-serving organizations. We help to support families by providing them with resources, programs, and other information. We help youth connect to a network of support by integrating them into the liturgical and pastoral life of the parish community. Building participation in other youth-serving organizations within the community further strengthens this network of support for young people.

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

This time in the life of an adolescent 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 active engagement of youth in the life of our communities. We seek to support the development of healthy, competent, caring, and faith filled youth by addressing their unique developmental, social, and religious needs. By addressing the obstacles and challenges to healthy adolescent development, we hope to foster positive growth and promote Catholic identity.

Components

The response to young peoples' personal and spiritual needs and the call to involve them in the faith community are most effectively done by establishing holistic and comprehensive programs. There are eight fundamental components described in the *Renewing the Vision (RTV)* document, which provide a framework for youth ministry.

1) Advocacy

“The ministry of advocacy engages the Church to examine its priorities and practices to determine how well young people are integrated into the life, mission, and work of the Catholic community” (RTV, 27).

2) Catechesis

“The ministry of catechesis most effectively promotes the faith development of young and older adolescents when the curriculum is focused on important faith themes drawn from the teachings of the Church and on the developmental needs and life experiences of adolescents” (RTV, 30).

3) Community Life

“The ministry of community life builds an environment of love, support, appreciation for diversity, and judicious acceptance that models Catholic principles; develops meaningful relationships; and nurtures Catholic faith” (RTV, 34).

4) Evangelization

“The ministry of evangelization shares the good news of the reign of God and invites young people to hear about the Word Made Flesh” (RTV, 36).

5) Justice and Service

“The ministry of justice and peace nurtures in young people a social consciousness and a commitment to a life of justice and service rooted in their faith in Jesus Christ, in the Scriptures, and in Catholic social teaching; empowers young people to work for justice by concrete efforts to address the causes of human suffering; and infuses the concepts of justice, peace, and human dignity into all ministry efforts” (RTV, 38).

6) Leadership Development

“The ministry of leadership development calls forth, affirms, and empowers the diverse gifts, talents, and abilities of adults and young people in our faith communities for comprehensive ministry with adolescents” (RTV, 40).

7) Pastoral Care

“The ministry of pastoral care is a compassionate presence in imitation of Jesus’ care of people, especially those who were hurting and in need” (RTV, 42).

8) Prayer and Worship

“The ministry of prayer and worship celebrates and deepens young people’s relationship with Jesus Christ through the bestowal of grace, communal prayer and liturgical experiences; it awakens their awareness of the spirit at work in their lives; it incorporates young people more fully into the sacramental life of the Church, especially Eucharist; it nurtures the personal prayer life of young people; and it fosters family rituals and prayer” (RTV, 44).

Underlying Assumptions for a Comprehensive Vision

Renewing the Vision encourages integrating parish ministry with young people and their families into the total life of the church, recognizing that the whole community is responsible for this ministry. The following themes of comprehensive ministry ensure that youth ministry utilizes all available resources and is all inclusive:

a) Developmentally Appropriate

“Effective ministry with adolescents provides developmentally appropriate experiences, programs, activities, strategies, resources, content, and processes to address the unique developmental and social needs of young and older adolescents both as individuals and members of families” (RTV, 20).

b) Family Friendly

“Ministry with adolescents recognizes that the family has the primary responsibility for the faith formation of young people and that the parish and Catholic school share in it” (RTV, 21).

c) Intergenerational

“Ministry with adolescents recognizes the importance of the intergenerational faith community in sharing faith and promoting healthy growth in adolescents” (RTV, 22).

d) Multicultural

“Ministry with adolescents is multicultural when it focuses on a specialized ministry to youth of particular racial and ethnic cultures and promotes multicultural awareness among all youths” (RTV, 22).

e) Community-wide Collaboration

“Community collaboration means building partnerships among families, schools, churches, and organizations that mobilize the community in a common effort to build a healthier community life and to promote positive adolescent development” (RTV, 24).

f) Leadership

“Ministry with adolescents mobilizes all of the resources of the faith community in a comprehensive and integrated approach. ... This approach involves a wide diversity of adult and youth leaders in a variety of roles necessary for comprehensive ministry” (RTV, 24).

g) Flexible/Adaptable Programming

“Ministry with adolescents creates flexible and adaptable program structures that address the changing needs and life situations of today’s young people and their families within a particular community”(RTV, 25).

Developing youth ministry takes time. It takes time to develop relationships with young people. And it takes time for youth to get the message that the church is really interested and committed to them. It takes a team of dedicated, loving adults who are willing to be models for youth. Youth ministry takes a variety of program activities, formats, and time frames to meet the differing needs and interests of young people.

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Ten Steps in Planning Youth Ministry

The *Groundbreaking* approach to developing youth ministry utilizes a team of interested adults and establishes a structure for assessing the needs of young people, designing appropriate programs as responses to their needs, and fosters an ongoing planning and evaluation process.

Step One: Get the Right People Together

The first step is developing a team for the youth ministry program. The team should include people who can be good adult role models, who are comfortable sharing their faith with youth and who like young people. The team should include a member of the parish staff if possible (pastor, director of religious education, pastoral associate, etc.). The team can also include selected young people who have demonstrated initiative, interest, and leadership abilities. The key is to avoid the “lone ranger” trap. Youth ministry is a team effort! It is also important for someone to serve as the team coordinator. A more formal coordinator can be chosen later, if necessary. In the early planning stages, someone has to facilitate the group and provide leadership. Consider the following:

- a) Who should be on the youth ministry team?
- b) Who will facilitate the team meetings?
- c) Who should serve as coordinator?
- d) How do we gain support of the parish staff?

Step Two: Understand Your Goals for Youth Ministry

The overview of youth ministry presented in the Introduction could be distributed and used as the basis for a team discussion. Be sure to begin each planning session with prayer. Pray for young people and their needs. Take time to pray for the willingness of the parish to welcome young people. The team needs to spend time clarifying their vision of youth ministry by considering the following:

- a) What is our vision of youth ministry?
- b) What do we want to accomplish?
- c) What do we want to provide the youth of our parish?
- d) Does our team have a holistic and comprehensive approach to ministry to young people?

This is a time for building team relationships and developing good communication within the group. The team should also discuss whether the program is for junior high, senior high, or both. This decision will affect the style and type of programs to be developed.

Step Three: Past Programs and the Current Situation

It is important for the team to look at the history of the parish’s youth ministry.

- a) What’s been done in the past?
- b) What’s going on right now?
- c) Do we have adolescent catechesis?
- d) Confirmation programs?
- e) Catholic Scouting?
- f) Athletics?
- g) Do we have a Catholic school?
- h) Have there been problems in the past?
- i) What worked and what did not work?

This step is an opportunity for the team to assess the history of youth ministry in the parish and look at the current situation in terms of ministry to youth. Sometimes it may be necessary to break from past failures by changing the name of your current efforts.

Step Four: Conduct a Needs Assessment

The purpose of the needs assessment is to identify what young people would like to see the parish offer and assess the best times and formats for meetings and activities. Your youth ministry efforts must begin with an understanding of the needs and wants of the youth and their families. This can be done through interviews with select youth, phone calls to parish youth, questionnaires or surveys distributed during or after Mass, or through a town meeting (described in *Getting Started: A Town Hall Meeting*). The key with the town meeting is to invite a good cross section of parish youth. This can be achieved through personal invitations by phone, flyer, email, or newsletter (get names and addresses through the parish census). Also use the parish bulletin and pulpit announcements.

- a) What will our team do to assess the needs, interests and concerns of our young people?
- b) Who?
- c) When?
- d) How?

Step Five: Brainstorm Program Activities and Ideas

Based on the needs from the assessment, it is time to generate program ideas. The discussion should use a holistic and comprehensive framework, developing ideas for each of the eight components in youth ministry, described in the Introduction. Prioritize your ideas. Do not try everything at once; do some things very well! Plan for quality activities and do not evaluate solely on the number of participants. Good programs and publicity will attract youth. Go for the short term, immediate successes at first. Then plan for the long term. Do not plan more than your team can actually do.

- a) What ideas do we have for each of the eight components?
- b) What are the top two in each area?
- c) What are our time and personnel limitations?
- d) How can we bolster our team effort?

Step Six: Develop the Ideas into Actual Programs

This step can be accomplished in smaller planning groups of 4-6 adults and youth. Each group could plan one event or activity. Good planning always answers the what, when, where, how, and who questions. (See the sample event planning form in *Getting Started*.) Plan a variety of program formats, times, and content. Plan activities that youth want. Gather youth ministry resources for planning (see Appendix). Plan well and plan for good publicity. Use flyers in the schools (if allowed), a newsletter sent to each parish teenager, personal phone contacts, email, the parish bulletin, the parish website, and posters around the parish. Be creative and always over- publicize!

- a) Have we answered all the basic planning questions?
- b) Have we planned for good publicity?
- c) Have we considered refreshments?
- d) How do we respond to positive responses?

- e) How do we respond to negative responses?

Step Seven: Develop a Youth Ministry Calendar

It might be easier to plan in seasonal or three-month blocks. Don't forget that the summer is an important time for programming, especially for younger adolescents. In planning, try to achieve a balance of programs among the eight components of comprehensive youth ministry. Check with the parish and local high school calendars, so you are not competing for your teens' time. Also check the diocesan office of youth ministry calendar. There is usually something going on that your young people can attend. It makes for easy planning and early success. You should also touch base with surrounding parishes for activities to which your young people can be invited. It is good for teenagers to see what others are doing and it helps them experience a larger sense of church.

- a) Have we checked the diocesan, parish, and school calendars?
- b) Do we have our activities spread out over the next few months?

Step Eight: Assign Responsibilities and Leaders

It is important to enable young people to take some responsibility for the program activities. Early in the process, however, adults should provide the leadership, if the youth are not ready for the responsibility. Each activity should have a lead agent or co-lead agents with a teen and adult together. This leadership could come from the planning team for that event.

- a) Do we have a planning team for each activity?
- b) Do we have a person assigned to each task?
- c) Have we discussed an appropriate role for youth?
- d) Is the team building confidence in itself by doing positive things for parish youth?
- e) How are young people being included in implementing and leading activities?
- f) How are we praying as a team for each activity?

Step Nine: Develop an Organizational Structure

An organizational structure provides the ongoing leadership and coordination needed for a comprehensive youth ministry program. The structure can vary according to the members and needs of your team. Program committees with youth and adults, a coordinating team, a youth board and adult advisory board are all options for your organization. Use the structure that will work for your team. Also, it is important to determine regular meeting times for the committees, team, or board and to identify the person who will coordinate the organization, set agendas, and facilitate the meetings.

- a) What structure will we use?
- b) How often will our coordinating team meet?
- c) Who will facilitate the team meetings?
- d) Who will take minutes of the meeting?
- e) Who will set the agenda?
- f) How has time for reflection and prayer been incorporated into planning sessions?

Step Ten: Planning and Evaluation Process

As part of your calendar of events, schedule the times when this group will re-assess the situation and plan for the upcoming year. Planning is an ongoing and intentional process and includes opportunities for team building and social times. You might use spring as the time for new needs

assessments and program calendaring, and June as time for the annual evaluation. Your planning will begin to incorporate some traditional events (things done every year; e.g. a Christmas social or Lenten Stations of the Cross), spontaneous events (spur of the moment activities; e.g. a trip during a sudden school holiday or a food drive in response to a natural disaster) and a cafeteria approach (variety of activities which allows youth some choice for participation). The team should also begin planning for leadership training for both youth and adult team members.

- a) When will we evaluate our year?
- b) When will we plan for the upcoming year?
- c) What opportunities for youth and adult training are available through the diocese or other means?
- d) Do we need outside consultation from the diocesan youth office in the evaluation process?

Youth Ministry Teams: Important Agenda Items

In addition to the tasks of planning, implementing, and evaluating the youth ministry program, the team must also consider several other important issues that affect both the planning process and the life of the team.

Nurture Community among the Team

Youth ministry requires that the team model the type of community it seeks to establish among young people. Take care to plan time for the team to work at getting to know and understand each other. Perhaps a retreat day just for the team is feasible. Do not be so anxious to get to the actual building of the program that you might overlook this essential step. Times for prayer, community building exercises, and opportunities to enjoy each other's company should be included on the agenda. Even after the team has been established, community building opportunities, especially prayer, should be continued. Remember too, that whenever new members join the team, time must be taken to re-build/re-enforce the team's community.

Volunteers

Check with the pastor or parish staff about the diocesan requirements for applying for volunteer service. If a volunteer will have substantial contact with minors, the following may need to be completed before he/she begins to serve:

- a) Application for volunteer service
- b) Names of references provided
- c) Volunteer criminal history screening consent form (fingerprinting)
- d) Training regarding child abuse and protection of children

Consider the Total Youth Ministry Effect

In planning your parish youth ministry program, you should be thinking larger than youth group. Total parish youth ministry includes many opportunities for youth. Parish sponsored Boy Scout and Girl Scout units are a common alternative for youth activities. Many parishes have athletic associations that sponsor youth teams in diocesan or recreation council leagues. A total parish youth ministry program should have some intentional outreach to parents of adolescents. An evangelization and outreach program that encourages youth participation might be an important part of parish youth ministry. All parishes must offer adolescents opportunities for continued catechesis beyond confirmation preparation.

Adolescent catechetical efforts can include free standing weekly, bi-weekly, and monthly programs, retreats, lock-ins, Scripture study, and a variety of other models. The youth ministry team should address the faith themes in *The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis* (NFCYM, 1986). Principles for designing such efforts can also be found in this document.

Beyond these different program possibilities, a comprehensive parish youth ministry should work with other parish organizations to encourage and enable them to include youth in their ministry. Youth can and should have a role in many different parish programs: liturgy committee, peace and justice committee, outreach and service program, planning teams for the parish activities, lectors, music ministry, vacation Bible school, etc.

Please realize that no parish can start with all of this. But it is important that the vision with

which you start includes the big picture. Remember to not limit yourself to thinking that parish youth ministry is the youth group.

Plan for Ongoing Training

Once a team has been assembled, it seems that every parish is anxious to get youth ministry rolling. Certainly, it is important to get some positive things accomplished while the group's energy is high. But do not forget to plan for training. Successful youth ministry never happens by chance. Skilled leaders and committed volunteers require initial and ongoing training. Check with your diocesan office of youth ministry for possible training opportunities. Diocesan, regional, and national conferences also provide opportunities for training.

Plan for Advocacy within the Parish

Remember that not all parishioners agree on the importance of youth ministry. For that reason it is important to keep the parish and the pastor aware of what is happening. Use the parish bulletin to advertise upcoming events and also to thank key leaders for their work on past successes. Make regular reports to the pastor and/or the parish council. If the parish has a newsletter, make sure you include news about the good things that young people in the parish have accomplished. Because there are some adults who have a negative image of adolescents, it is important to help the parish learn about the positive impact that youth have in the community.

Prayer

This is not "just one more item" that is important to your youth ministry team meetings. Prayer should be the first item on all meeting agendas. Moreover, prayer brings the team together and establishes a common ground on which to build youth ministry. Take the time to be creative with the prayer experiences. Do not be afraid to spend 15-20 minutes of the meeting in prayer. Utilize different forms of prayer, especially prayer that allows the team to share their faith or their vision of ministry. Prayer works best in bringing the team together when all members of the team take turns in planning the prayer. Utilize your resources. Where possible, the team might come together for Mass prior to the meeting. Be sensitive to the many different styles of prayer that members of the team prefer and make it known that all styles are welcome. Young people will learn to pray better when the adult team models good prayer habits.

Key Roles in Youth Ministry Programming

The previous chapters described the actual process of developing a youth ministry program and some of the important issues that a team must consider. Within this process, however, there are several very important functions and roles that are integral in developing a comprehensive approach to youth ministry. Though these roles have already been mentioned, each requires more specific description.

Coordinator of Youth Ministry

This role is crucial for providing coordination for a parish's youth ministry efforts. This person can be full time or part time, salaried, volunteer, or receive a stipend. It is **not** the function of this person to **do** the entire youth ministry in the parish. It **is** this person's responsibility to **enable** the parish's ministry to young people. Five key areas for the coordinator to focus their attention on include:

- a) Direct Programming
- b) Seasonal Programming
- c) Leadership Development
- d) Sacramental and/or catechetical programs
- e) Administration

Essential tasks of the coordinator include:

- a) Coordinate the parish's ministry to young people
- b) Facilitate the youth ministry team in its efforts
- c) Serve as the liaison with the parish council and/or the pastor
- d) Coordinate the recruitment, training, support, and evaluation of volunteers in the youth ministry program
- e) Provide resources (print, video, web, training opportunities, diocesan events, etc.)
- f) Advocate for using *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* in the parish

Youth Ministry Team

Youth ministry is a team effort. The team usually consists of committed adults and young people, many of whom are involved in the program as program or activity leaders. Sometimes there is an adult advisory committee that oversees the youth ministry efforts and provides resources and direction. The planning team, itself handles the practical implementation of the program. Sometimes the function of the advisory committee is absorbed into the planning team. Regardless of what model is utilized, the planning team has the following tasks:

- a) Responsible for needs assessments, setting goals and objectives, and designing programmatic responses
- b) Handles the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the designed program
- c) Watches for holistic programming, which might include the following: including scouting, sports, adolescent catechesis, confirmation, parent involvement and programs, justice and service activities
- d) Fosters the involvement of young people in the life of the parish, including serving on various parish committees and being involved in parish activities

Program and Activity Leaders

These individuals have the responsibility for specific areas or activities within the total youth ministry program. Their responsibilities include:

- a) Direct responsibility for the planning, implementation and evaluation of critical areas within the program, for example: confirmation coordinator, justice and service coordinator, parish sports program director, youth group coordinator, scoutmaster
- b) Direct responsibility for specific activities, for example: catechists, coaches, scout leaders, youth group advisors, trip leaders

Chaperones

This important role is often where the relational dimension of youth ministry is most evident. These individuals provide the necessary supervision and involvement for programs to exist.

Their tasks include:

- a) Provide a consistent adult presence at youth ministry activities
- b) Provide appropriate supervision, as outlined by the planning team and/or coordinator
- c) Interact with the young people, developing relationships of respect, trust and care
- d) These are **not** just drivers or guards, their role is to build relationships with the young people