

## ***Structuring for Youth Ministry***

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Living in earthquake country (i.e. California), you learn very quickly the importance of building strong structures. Having been in more than a few earthquakes, I am thankful that all the buildings I was in were able to sustain the hit. In short, the building did not fall down.

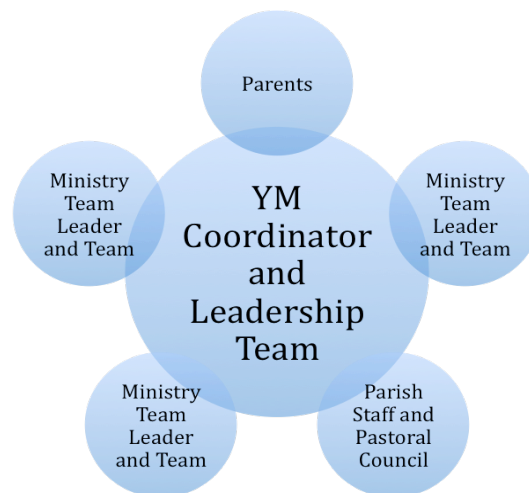
Can your youth ministry survive an earthquake?

Having been in diocesan ministry for four years, I've seen ministries that thrive and ministries that die. At some point, all youth ministry is hit by an earthquake. Many have a passion and a love for teenagers, but often don't know where to begin in building a sustainable youth ministry. Youth ministry starts with relationships with young people, parents, and leaders. That needs to come first. Always. Beyond that, many are at a loss as to what to do next. Often, youth ministry leaders begin churning out programs and events, in essence, beginning to build the structure before a solid plan and foundation have been set. The result: a house of cards that falls even with the slightest wind of resistance.

There are many ways to build a solid youth ministry structure, and this is one option for you. The hope is that we can work to create youth ministry that can last through even the toughest and strongest of quakes.

### **Structures that Last**

In fear of sounding too businessy, we need to create an organizational chart for our youth ministry:



#### ***Youth Ministry Coordinator (YMC):***

The YMC oversees the entire ministry programming efforts for a parish. They serve as an advocate for youth ministry in the parish and is the ultimate keeper of the vision. When others in the parish are losing sight of the big picture and the 'why' of youth ministry, it is

the job of the coordinator to instill that vision once again into the minds and hearts of the church community. To be an advocate, the YMC must have a strong understanding of the mission of the church and of youth ministry. *Renewing the Vision* (USCCB 1997) outlines three goals that we should be moving towards as we serve our young people.

Understanding the vision is just the first step. The more difficult step is to effectively communicating that vision. The YMC facilitates the leadership team and makes sure that youth ministry is aligned with the mission and vision of the parish.

#### *Leadership Team:*

The Leadership team, under the direction of the youth ministry coordinator, sets the vision for youth ministry. Their task is to set measurable goals to attain that vision and to begin to move the vision forward. This team makes sure that they are meeting the needs of all the young people in the parish by making sure the ministry is addressing the three goals and the eight components of youth ministry that our outlined in *Renewing the Vision*. In essence, they are charged with creating the strategic plan for the entire youth ministry. This team can consist of volunteers, both adults and youth, as well as parents and parish staff members. The Leadership Team also makes sure that the Ministry Teams have the resources they need to be successful, whether that be money, supplies, or training. Most Leadership Team members will be volunteers and we would be wise to note that their time is limited. It is recommended that they serve for a specified time that can be renewable (i.e. two years).

#### *Ministry Team Leader:*

This person is tasked with heading up one event, program, or team. This person invites a team of leaders to begin to outline the specific goals and objectives of the event, program, or team, and begins to move towards those objectives. This person can be the leader of that specific team for the duration of the event or program, or for a designated time set by the leadership team. It is helpful that this person serves on the Leadership Team so that their team is aligned to the mission and vision of the entire youth ministry and can see the big picture of their specific team. However, it is not essential. It can be a good idea to have co-team leaders that can serve in a leadership capacity together to avoid being over-worked or burnout. It is also a great way to mentor and train new members into leadership positions for the future.

#### *Ministry Team:*

This team helps the Ministry Team Leader carry out the duties of the team. These teams can be standing teams that meet year-round (hospitality, leadership recruitment, communication, youth liturgy, service outreach, etc...), or they could be event or program driven (retreat, confirmation preparation, youth night, etc...). Their job is to implement and carry out a plan, report to the Leadership Team, and evaluate the process, event, and/or program. This level of leadership is a great introductory level for young people to serve as leaders.

#### *Parents:*

Parents are an integral part of youth ministry. Good youth ministry should be a family ministry. It is important to get the input of parents, as they are the ones that know their

teenager the best. Parents can play many roles, including serving in the roles listed above. It is also helpful to have a team of parents that meet regularly to find ways to support the entire youth ministry. They can serve as chaperones, raise money for youth ministry, mentor young people that are not their own child, create a prayer ministry for youth ministry, etc... The ways they can serve is endless. Take advantage of the fact that parents care deeply for their children and want the best for them. If they believe that youth ministry is supporting the development of their teenager, they will go a long way to show their support.

*Parish Staff and Pastoral Council:*

The Parish Staff and Pastoral Council should support and provide resources for youth ministry. They cannot do this unless they are made aware of the efforts that youth ministry is making to serve the young people of the parish. It is imperative that the YMC, or members of the Leadership Team, report to the Parish Staff and Pastoral Council on a regular basis. This time can merely consist of reporting to them the successes and challenges of youth ministry, or can serve as an opportunity to advocate for youth ministry and resources, as they are often the keepers of the keys, checkbook, and church membership (i.e. people power). Having the Parish Staff and Pastoral Council on your side and serving as youth ministry advocates reaps many benefits. Be intentional about how you reach out to these individuals and take the time to get to know them.

It is important to note that, although there is an element of a top down hierarchy, there are no arrows in the chart above. Collaboration is the key and each team serves the other teams. Although the YMC and the Leadership Team are overseeing the entire youth ministry, their task is to serve the Ministry Teams so that they are able to do the task that has been entrusted to them.

This kind of structure allows us to move away from the “superhero” youth ministry coordinator who can do everything that our young people need in the church. It is not a healthy mentality and can lead very quickly to pastor disapproval, parent disappointment, and coordinator unfulfillment. Plus, that mentality does not serve our teens well. Take up structures that allow you to fully embrace the model of comprehensive youth ministry that has been set forth.

Remember, all leaders in youth ministry must be building relationships with the young people they serve. Whatever structures you have in place will not be effective or fruitful if they cannot make those relational connections.