



PLANS OF HOPE
HOUMA-THIBODAUX PARISH PLANNING

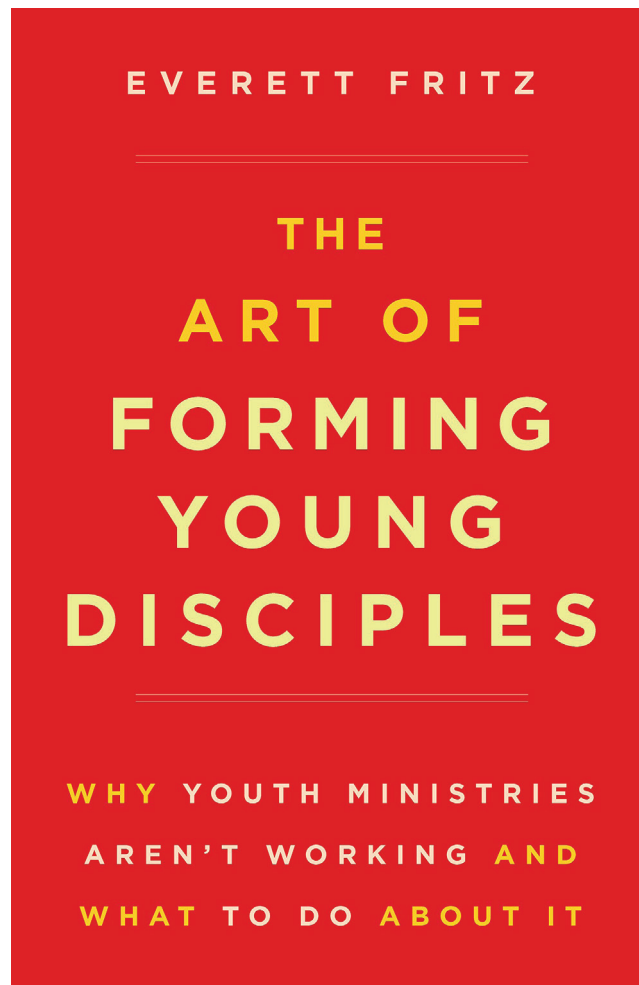
DIOCESAN PLANNING PRIORITY NO. 2: YOUTH FORMATION

CHAPTER 12
SECTION 8



WHAT?

What is *not* working and *why* is it not working?



Introduction

THE MEASURE OF SUCCESS

When asked by a colleague “How many teens do you think will become lifelong disciples coming out of youth ministry?” He immediately began to make excuses:

It’s not about the numbers.

The parents are the real problem.

All teens are at different levels of development. Some are rich soil, while others are rocky or full of weeds. In some cases, we’re planning seeds that will take root later in a teen’s life.

He replied he thought about 10. When asked, “What did you do differently with those ten that you didn’t do with the other teens in your youth ministry?” When he thought about it he realized, “those ten teens were the ones I had spent the most time with.

I did Bible study with them.

I mentored them in their prayer life.

I had a type of relationship with them in which I could challenge them to live virtuously.

I answered the difficult questions these teens had about the Faith.

I knew and mentored their parents.

I spent most of my relational ministry time with these teens.

“What you’re describing to me is called discipleship - the process of mentoring someone through relationship and living example.” (pg. 6)

“In parishes, we try to program our teens instead of mentoring them. Teens need adult guidance and deep, meaningful relationships with other teens. And there is no possible way for one youth minister to meet the pastoral needs of every teen in the parish. Instead of thinking about the youth in the parish as one large group, I needed to think smaller. I needed to find a way to get on a mentoring level with every teen in the parish.” (pg. 6)

Part 1: Understanding Youth Ministry

Chapter 1: We Are Losing Our Youth

“But is participation alone a good indicator of success? Do we really have many, many young people who are being formed in Catholicism, ensuring the passing on of our Faith for generations to come?” (pg. 12)

CATHOLIC YOUTH MINISTRY IS NOT WORKING

“When a soul walks away from the Church, that soul usually leaves when it is young.” (p.13)

“Dynamic Catholic states that 85 percent of Catholic young adults stop practicing their Faith (most of them within their first year of leaving home).” (pg. 13)

After walking around a youth ministry conference expo: “If we are losing our young people in the Church today, it isn’t due to a lack of effort. Nor is it due to a lack of good resources and programs.” (pg. 14)

“Between the millions of dollars that the Church has invested in Catholic secondary education, and the time, talent, and treasure in youth ministry, young people get more attention from the Catholic Church than does any other ministry or demographic. Why is there so little return on that investment? More importantly, why is the Church failing to make young disciples?” (pg. 14)

UNDERSTANDING DISCIPLESHIP

“The disciple imitates the rabbi...I believe discipleship is marked by three characteristics: it is a process, it is an apprenticeship, and it involves practicing discipline.” (pg. 15)

Discipleship is a Process

Five thresholds a person passes as he grows into intentional discipleship of Jesus (Sherry Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples*)

- Initial Trust
- Spiritual Curiosity
- Spiritual Openness
- Spiritual Seeking
- Intentional Disciple

Discipleship doesn’t happen in an instant: it’s an ongoing process in life.

Discipleship is an Apprenticeship

“Discipleship is not discipleship without mentoring. A disciple must first be inspired to follow the rabbi. And then be impacted by his living example. In discipleship the Faith is not taught; it is caught. It is experimental in nature: the disciple learns by following the example of the rabbi.” (pg. 17)

Disciples Practice Disciplines

“Latin word *discere*, ‘to learn.’ A disciple learns to be a disciplined person in everyday life. This means that disciples practice habits, and those habits lead to deeper conversion.” (pg. 17)

“Most importantly, these practice disciplines lead to a personal relationship with Christ - a relationship in which the disciple makes Jesus Christ the Lord and Savior of his life.” (pg. 17)

“If a young person becomes a lifelong follower of Christ, the following habits will likely be visible in his life: regular visits to the Blessed Sacrament; weekly or even daily Mass attendance; daily prayer, including the Rosary; reading and studying Scripture; intentional growth in virtue and service; and tithing This is what we want - to form our young people into lifelong followers of Jesus Christ and His Church through the process of discipleship.” (pg. 18)

THE CRUX OF THE PROBLEM

“Ask a person associated with the Church why youth ministry is struggling, and you will likely hear responses I have heard many times:

- A pastor will say that he lacks the funds necessary to hire a capable youth minister.
- A pastor will say that he can't find or keep a qualified youth minister.
- A youth minister will say that her pastor is not supportive.
- A parent will say that her teen doesn't like the youth group and doesn't connect with the youth minister.
- A youth minister will complain that parents are disengaged and aren't supportive of their teenagers' faith.
- A parent will complain that the Catholic school isn't doing a good job teaching the core doctrines of the Faith.
- A Catholic-school teacher will complain that parents are not modeling the Faith for their children at home.
- A parent will complain that the church youth group or religious-education program is not much more than stale pizza, lame entertainment, and a boring curriculum.
- A parent will state that he is waiting for the pastor to fire the middle-aged DRE who is under-qualified for working with young people and out-of-touch with modern methods of ministry.
- A diocesan director will observe that parish leadership lacks vision, so that teens end up planning their own ministry, or pastors and youth leaders end up pinning their hope of success on the latest program resources.
- A bishop will observe that youth-ministry events in his diocese are all hype, flash, and entertainment, and no substance.
- A teenager will complain that the Church doesn't understand teens and their questions about God and faith aren't being answered.”

“Any one of these statements may be true, but not one single one of them correctly identifies the problem in the Church today. These are symptoms of a greater problem: we don't understand young people and how to meet their most basic needs. If we don't understand the problem, we can never hope to solve it.” (pg. 19)

Evangelii Gaudium - “Youth ministry, as traditionally organized, has also suffered the impact of social changes. Young people often fail to find responses to their concerns, needs, problems, and hurts in the usual structures. As adults, we find it hard to listen patiently to them, to appreciate their concerns, demands, and to speak to them in a language they can understand. For the same reason, our efforts in the field of education do not produce the results expected.” (pg. 20)

“The structures our Church uses to minister to young people are not meeting their basic needs, and because of this, our young people are failing to become disciples. It’s not enough to have the best resources money can buy - a youth minister, a Catholic school - or to be catechizing a large number of teens. The landscape of youth culture is changing. In fact, in some cases, parishes are implementing approaches to youth formation that haven’t been updated in more than four hundred years.” (pg. 20)

“Our Church is facing a crisis - we are hemorrhaging young people. For decades, the Church has been talking of a New Evangelization - a kind of new birth or revolution of the gospel in the Church. But no major revolution in the world has ever thrived without a youth movement. The Church cannot reinvigorate her members so long as her young people are uninspired.” (pg. 20)

Chapter 2: The Nature of Youth Ministry

WHAT IS YOUTH CULTURE?

“A culture is the way of life of a people - what they value, how they communicate, how they dress, their music, dance, and customs. In recent years, there has been a lot of talk in the Church about the development of a ‘youth culture’ in America. But what is ‘youth culture?’” (pg. 22)

Prior to the industrial revolution - straight from childhood into adulthood, learning the trade of their parents. Higher education not an option → As the work became more complex, there was a need for more education. Young people stayed in school longer and we see the emerge of adolescence. “Teenagers in school were not yet adults but were also no longer children.” → Post WWII - “culture” began to develop around teens, country was booming economically and television came into the picture. G.I. Bill made it possible for more people to get an education. Companies began to “discover that American teenagers were a marketable demographic.” Teens began to have their own “hairstyles, a way of speaking, clothes, music, values, and ideals that were different from those of their parents.” → As the youth culture grew in the 60’s: Young people experienced several revolutions: sexual, rock-n-roll, drug, and anti-authority movement. At about the same time we have Vatican II. “Since then, not much has changed. That’s because the ‘culture’ that developed out of this time has largely influenced the upbringing and development of young people over the past several decades.” (pg. 23)

“An interesting fact about youth culture is that its ideals, styles, languages, and trends are constantly changing. A generation of teenagers lasts only about seven years, and each new one seeks to differentiate itself from the previous generation. Things change rapidly in youth culture - and therefore efforts in evangelization and discipling teens have to change as well in order to maintain effectiveness.” (pg. 24)

“In our Church today, we cannot say, ‘Let’s rely on the methods the Church used several decades ago, when the seminaries were full and teens were more virtuous.’ These methods won’t work with teenagers today. We’re dealing with a different culture, which necessitates a constant missionary approach in order to be effective.” (p.24)

WHAT IS A MISSIONARY?

“A missionaries job is to evangelize a culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ. But missionaries do not do this merely by setting up classes and communicating dogmas and traditional prayers.” (pg. 24)

“A missionary spends time in a culture to gain that culture’s trust. A missionary gains trust by building relationships. In building relationships, the missionary earns the right to be heard. Also, by building relationships with the people, the missionary learns the culture’s language and value - which, in turn, helps the missionary communicate the gospel.” (pg. 24)

“A missionary doesn’t seek to create cookie-cutter Catholic cultures. Rather, he seeks to baptize particular cultures, identifying the good within them and using understood value to elevate them to an understanding and acceptance of the teachings of Catholicism.” (p.25)

“In order for youth ministry to be successful, we must learn to listen to young people - to their value, worries and way of life - and where possible, we must find ways to teach and baptize into Catholicism what they value. Merely setting up classes to teach traditional prayers will never be effective in evangelizing the modern-day teenager.” (pg. 25)

WHAT IS MINISTRY?

“Ministry is the process of meeting a person’s pastoral needs. This is an extremely important concept. It’s not enough to have a curriculum, resources, structure, volunteers, participation, and events. If youth ministry at the parish doesn’t meet a young person’s primary pastoral needs, then youth ministry is not happening.” (pg. 26)

“To make disciples, we must form people intellectually, spiritually, and as human persons. To minister to a person, we must identify his needs as they relate to each of these categories. This requires individualized attention. Every individual has pastoral needs, and when a person lacks relationships with mentors and like-minded peers in his church, he lacks the relationships that are necessary to meet his individualized needs.” (p.26)

“If success is measured by making disciples, then our ministry has to start with a plan for meeting the individualized needs of each young person...Unfortunately, youth ministry has become a series of programs and events intended to keep kids in the Church in hopes that we won’t lose them. If we have any hope of stopping the loss of our youth, we must start at the source of the problem and meet the basic pastoral needs of each person.” (pg. 27)

Chapter 3: Understanding The Needs Of Every Teen

MEETING TEENS' BASIC NEEDS

“Why is it that so many (teens) are not becoming lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ? Because their basic needs are not being met by our Church structures.” (pg. 32)

“My colleague Sean Dalton at the Augustine Institute in Denver articulates better than anyone the five basic needs of teens: the need to be understood, the need to belong, the need to be transparent, the need for critical thinking about faith and life, and the need for guidance.” (pg. 32)

THE NEED TO BE UNDERSTOOD

“If I don't first understand the people I am ministering to, I can never hope to reach them with the gospel. Every person has a cross in his life, and the first step in helping someone to accept Christ's love is to help him to carry his cross.” (pg. 33)

“Too many ministries in parishes approach teens with the intention of teaching them about the Faith without first seeking to know them...Teenagers don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Before you teach them about the Faith, you must earn the right to be heard.” (pg. 34)

THE NEED TO BELONG

“Teenagers, however, have such a strong need to belong that they will sacrifice the moral values that they are raised with in order to belong.” (pg. 34)

“Parents understand better than anyone their teens' need to belong. This is why so many parents are willing to overcommit their teenagers to so many activities - so their teenagers will find community and belonging. Parents know that if they don't get their teenagers' need to belong met, their teens may find a sense of belonging in a community that they don't want them to be a part of.” (pg. 34)

“When parents prioritize their kids' extracurricular activities ahead of faith formation, what they essentially are saying to the parish leadership is that their children find a greater sense of belonging within their extracurricular activities than they do in the Church. That means the parish is at fault: the parish is failing to meet the children's basic needs. In these cases, when parish leadership insists that teens participate in the parish faith formation (or else, for example, they will be unable to receive a sacrament), the parish puts the parents in a difficult position. Do the parents put their children in the parish formation program, where their kids will not feel as if they belong? Or do they keep them on the soccer team with all their friends? More times than not, the Church loses the battle.” (pg. 35)

“We cannot expect teens to become lifelong disciples unless we create an environment (or environments) in which teens can develop friendships with other teens and find a sense of belonging in our parishes.” (pg. 36)

THE NEED TO BE TRANSPARENT

“Many teens do not have friends with whom they can be transparent...Often, if a teenager is having difficulty with something in his life, he doesn’t have anyone he feels he can approach about that problem - and about his subsequent emotions.” (pg. 36)

“Teens make you work for their affection, but once they find that you are willing to listen to their problems, to treat them with respect, and to offer them help, they become an open book.” (pg. 37)

“Every teen is a person, and every person carries a cross. All teens have a basic need to be transparent, because if they can’t be transparent about their struggles, they’ll never learn how to surrender their cross to Christ.” (pg. 37)

THE NEED FOR CRITICAL THINKING ABOUT THE FAITH

“Teens have a lot of questions about faith and religion, and they want answers to their questions. The Catholic Church does a fantastic job of answering questions. The Catholic Church does a fantastic job of answering questions that teens do not have but does not do a good job of answering the questions that teens do have.” (pg. 37)

“On Sundays, most teenagers enter a church where the message communicated from the pulpit has little relation to their life (actually, that’s the experience of most Catholics in general). In faith-formation classes, most teens endure a predetermined curriculum that systematically walks them through the dogmas of the Creed and the Catechism. Sometimes, they experience a predetermined curriculum that is disjointed, with no scope and sequence at all. Seldom does a teenager experience formation in his faith that grows organically out of the natural questions he has.” (pg. 37)

“Naturally, as children enter adolescence and their minds critical-thinking capabilities...they develop questions about faith and even challenge some of the things they have been taught. This is good. They are engaging in critical thinking. It’s the beginning of their taking ownership of their faith.” (pg. 38)

“Unfortunately, too often, the method of teaching and engaging teens in the parish does not change as children grow into adolescence. Too often, the Church expects teens simply to accept what is communicated to them. If they don’t receive good answers to their questions, teens begin to believe that the Church doesn’t have good answers because good answers don’t exist. They become disengaged in church and begin to reject the dogmas of the Church in favor of the dogmas of their youth culture. Eventually, as these teens enter adulthood, they stop attending church altogether.” (pg. 39)

“Teens need relationships, and, within those relationships, they have to be given the opportunity to engage in critical thinking and discussions about faith and life.” (pg. 39)

THE NEED FOR GUIDANCE

“Looking at the schedule of the average American teenager, consider this important question: At what point during most teenagers’ daily schedules do they have a meaningful conversation with an adult?” (pg. 40)

“Most teens don’t have adults who provide guidance in their lives. In this period when teens are most in need of guidance, our culture has removed from their lives the very people who are responsible for providing guidance. The average schedule for an American teenager does not allow for mentoring relationships with adults. As a result, when teenagers need advice, they’re more likely to turn to a peer than to an adult because they have relationships with their peers and no relationship with adults.” (pg. 40)

Part 2 The Catholic Youth Ministry Problem

Chapter 4: The Cultural Problem: The Separation of Youth from Adults

“We expect them (teenagers) to learn to participate in the world of adults, but our culture has largely removed adults from the mentoring roles with teenagers. As a result, teens are growing up in a peer-dominated culture. As they grow into adulthood, they have difficulty assimilating into the adult world and into the responsibilities and expectations that come with being an adult.” (pg. 46)

“THEY HAVE NO CLUE”

“One study found that adolescents spent only 4/8% of their time with their parents and only 2% with adults who were not their parents.” (pg. 47)

“The peer-dominated world of today’s youth struggles with suicide, self-worth and identity, dangerous sexual attitudes, unhealthy stress and expectations, and addictions to social media and gaming. What’s more, Dr. (Chap) Clark found that teens believe that their parents are unaware of the struggles in their life.” (pg. 47)

LORD OF THE FLIES

“A recent survey shows that the average American family spends less than eight hours together each week.” (pg. 49)

CHILDREN YEARN FOR PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

“The perception in our culture is that young people do not want relationships with adults or parents. Yet *USA Today* surveyed 1,200 teenagers and 76% of them said that they wanted their parents to spend more time with them.” (pg. 49)

PARENTS ARE THE PRIMARY EDUCATORS

“I believe that parents don’t fail as primary educators as much as we think. Most parents I know are not theologians, and all of them are sinners. But I know many parents who love their children. And if parents know how to love their children, then the Church can and should build off this example to teach a child the gospel.” (pg. 51)

“I have found that parents who love their children are more motivated than anyone else to meet their children’s pastoral needs. Yet parents of teenagers are burned out and can be uncertain about what to do with their teenagers.” (pg. 51)

“They (parents) wanted meaningful relationships for their teenagers, and they wanted their own need for support in their vocation as parents heard by the parish leadership.” (pg. 52)

MINISTRY PROFESSIONALS CAN MAKE PARENTS THE ENEMY

“If parents are to blame for failing to raise their children in the Faith, ministry leaders are also to blame for failing to engage and partner with parents who are willing to raise their children in the Faith.” (pg. 54)

Chapter 5: The Parish Problem: Why Youth Groups Fail

THE PROBLEMS WITH THE YOUTH-GROUP MENTALITY

“A youth group tries to create an entertaining or interactive presentation of the Faith for a large number of teenagers in one space. Yet successful youth ministry has little to do with the programs presented to teens and everything to do with the relationships that teens have with the people mentoring them.” (pg. 59)

“Even when a youth group is executed well, there are inherent problems that affect the success of youth ministry. Here are a few:” (pg. 60)

Group Meetings Engage Few Teens

“Large-group faith formation requires the youth minister to choose either a basic track or a deeper track, ensuring that he will miss the majority of his audience.” (pg. 60)

No Teen Wants A Relationship With Every Teen In The Parish

Large-Group Youth Programs Hinder Ministry

Youth Groups Are Generally Superficial

“There are times when I appreciate a good icebreaker, game funny presentation, skit or movie clip to pull me into a presentation. If this is presented to me every week, however, I get annoyed and irritated.” (pg. 61)

“Every hour spent preparing a presentation is one less hour spent in relationship with teens - and relationships are where basic needs get met.” (pg. 61)

Popular Youth Ministers Are Not The Answer

“In many cases, effective large-group youth ministry depends on the gifts and talents of a particular youth minister. Only 12% of parishes currently pay a full-time youth minister, and the average burnout for a parish youth minister is around two years. Given these statistics, if successful youth ministry depends on finding a dynamic youth minister, the Church is going to struggle to build sustainable youth ministry in parishes.” (pg. 62)

Youth Groups Can Be Quite Expensive

Youth Groups Are Largely Obsolete

Religious-Education-Based Ministers Don't Work

“Youth activities became popular over forty years ago as a method of youth ministry intended to get teens to participate in their parishes. They largely consist of a series of organized fun activities that teens attend at the parish - and that’s basically it. That isn’t youth ministry because there’s no ministering involved.” (pg. 65)

“Teens can have social gatherings anywhere. They don’t need to come to church to have a social life (unless they’re among the handful of teens who have no social life). Youth ministry has to be about a lot more than social gatherings.” (pg. 65)

“In religious-education programs, parishes require teenagers to sit in a classroom with a volunteer catechist for two hours each week and receive systematic catechesis on Catholicism. I had a professor in college who said, ‘It’s a mortal sin to bore someone with the gospel.’ If that’s true, there are a lot of catechists who are going to Hell.” (pg. 66)

Chapter 6: The Catholic School Problem: It’s A Train Wreck

THE TERRIFYING REALITY OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

“Catholic education represents the single biggest investment in youth ministry in the Catholic Church...A Catholic school has the chance to work with students for the better part of their week, and even in their extracurricular activities, to form their intellect and values. Apart from parents, a Catholic school has the greatest opportunity to impact the lives and directions of young persons.” (pg. 70)

“Here are some of the things that I commonly hear from alumni of Catholic schools:

- The vast majority of our classmates are no longer practicing Catholicism.
- Bullying and cliques were commonplace.
- The religion teachers knew little or not theology and were not equipped to teach even the most dogmatic teachings. I’ve taught at schools in theology departments who hired people with no theology degree who literally wanted to “give teaching a try” and because there are little to no state requirements, a theology position was the “best spot” for this person.
- Many of the teachers demonstrated little understanding of Catholicism, and many were not practicing Catholics.
- Administrators were lacking in their witness of Catholic values to the students.
- The student subculture within the school was saturated with drug and alcohol abuse and promiscuity.
- There were liturgies filled with all kinds of abuses - including liturgical dance, skits during Mass and other gimmicks to try to get kids more involved in the Mass.

Catholic teaching focused primarily on service to others and moral teaching, which was basically a list of the rules we were supposed to follow in our lives.”

THE CHANGING CULTURE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

“Several decades ago, every Catholic family sent their children to Catholic schools. The attitudes of families was that it was the school’s responsibility to form young persons in the Faith (which has contributed to the problem of parents failing to raise their children in the Faith). With the rise of tuition and expenses in Catholic schools and the growth of public education (which is paid for by taxes), more and more Catholics sought alternatives to Catholic schools.” (pg. 72)

“Fewer Catholic families send their children to Catholic schools than ever before.” (p.73)

“In the 1950’s and 1960’s, Catholic schools had the luxury of having very little overhead expense. Nuns and priests didn’t need to be paid much to work. But with the decline in vocations and the massive number of Catholic schools, the schools had to turn to lay teachers to keep themselves staffed. This meant an increase in tuition in order to pay lay teachers a living wage (something that many Catholic schools still struggle to do). Furthermore, very few lay teachers had formal philosophical or theological training. There soon became little to differentiate Catholic school education from public school education. If there is no difference in the quality or type of education, people are not going to pay for something they can get for free.” (pg. 73)

“Many Catholic schools tried to provide more value by focusing almost entirely on ‘academic excellence.’ Don’t get me wrong. Academic excellence should be the mark of every Catholic school. But when it becomes the sole focus and primary marketable asset of the education, the school fails to attract a student-body that reflects the Catholic value necessary to create a Catholic subculture.” (pg. 73)

“A Catholic school can have the best teaching methods, the best Catholic teachers, and the best curriculum, but without a student body focused on living their Faith (because they come from families that reinforce faith), the student subculture in the school will never be truly Catholic.” (pg. 74)

“More and more faithful Catholic families are turning to homeschooling. Many of these families (because they are open to life and faithfully living out Catholic teaching) have many children, and putting them all through Catholic schools is not affordable. Ironically, many home-schooled youths end up better educated and more mature in their Faith because they have adult guidance daily and their education is individualized to meet their needs...Catholic schools are missing out on these families. These are exactly the young people who can change the environment of the Catholic school to create a true, Catholic subculture.” (pg. 74)

THE LACK OF ORTHODOXY IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Land O’Lakes Conference, 1967 - “Much can be written about the impact of this conference, but the long and short of it is that these leaders signed a statement that declared that their Catholic universities were separate from Church hierarchy...This allowed Catholic universities to become institutions for ‘religious dialogue’ and ‘free thought,’ which mean that they became safe haven for Church dissenters.” (pg. 75)

“The effect of this conference on the Catholic identity of primary and secondary Catholic schools was catastrophic. With the majority of lay teachers being educated at these universities, it became difficult to find teachers who were capable of teaching and witnessing the ‘right teachings’ of the Catholic Church. Catholic education went through a crisis of faith for several decades and even still feels the effects of this great Catholic dissent.” (pg. 75)

WHAT CATHOLIC EDUCATION SHOULD LOOK LIKE

“It is not enough for a school to hire a few good religion teachers or a campus minister, or to have a few priests teaching on campus. Every person a student encounters on school property must be actively trying to be a Christian witness. When a student is saturated in Catholicism as a lived experience, he cannot help but be formed by those experiences.” (pg. 78)

WHAT CATHOLIC EDUCATION CAN LOOK LIKE

“It isn’t simply about having a religion class, service hours, or liturgies available for children. Catholicism can and should be taught in every subject.” (pg. 79)

Part 3: The Twofold Solution

Chapter 7: Small Group Discipleship

THE “SERMON ON THE MOUNT” MENTALITY

“Jesus had twelve apostles. Those twelve lived with Him and were mentored by Him for three years. Those twelve carried the gospel all over the world. Those twelve were His biggest success story. Jesus’ large group ministry didn’t have the biggest impact on the world; His small-group ministry changed the world.” (pg. 85)

“What if, instead of thinking of all the youth in the parish as one large group, I thought about them as a series of small groups? What if I abandoned the youth-group concept and other programmed concepts in favor of doing ministry the way Jesus did it? What if I stopped giving Sermons on the Mount and instead spent my efforts in youth ministry developing a system of discipleship - one in which I invested my time in a handful of teenagers and other adult mentors instead of trying to stretch myself to meet the needs of every young person?” (pg. 86)

YOUTH MINISTRY THAT WORKS

“Within one year, I went from having three small groups of teens to having twelve small groups. I went from having a weekly youth group with 60 teens participating to having 120 teens disciplined in small groups that met throughout the week (in many locations). The youth ministry doubled in size in a year’s time, but what was more important was that discipleship was happening and pastoral needs were being met.” (pg. 87)

“I loved small-group discipleship because I was no longer spending my time planning silly activities and dynamic presentations for the youth group. I was free to spend my time mentoring the handful of teens I was passionate about and mentoring adults who were leading the small groups.” (pg. 87)

“The teens loved the small groups because the attention they received was individualized and the small groups were meeting on their own turf (homes, coffee shops, their school). They developed close friendships and found that they were listened to and understood by their group leader. They found a sense of belonging; they could be transparent about what was going on in their lives; and they could get their questions about the Faith answered.” (pg. 88)

“The core teams of adult volunteers loved the small groups because they could focus all their attention on the same handful of teenagers every week, and they could see a real different in the teens they were working with over the course of several years. They also got to meet with the teens when their schedule allowed for it, rather than having to give up their Sunday nights to assist at the mediocre youth group. This made it much easier to recruit more adults into the ministry.” (pg. 88)

“Parents loved the small groups because they saw how small group discipleship was meeting the basic needs for their teens. Many of them were more than willing to open their homes and host the small groups for dinner. This presented the opportunity to start to evangelize the entire family, because the simple gesture of doing ministry within the home presented the example of discipleship to the parents. The structure of the small groups also provided more flexibility, which accommodated the busy schedules of parents.” (pg. 88)

“The pastor loved the small groups because the youth ministry was growing. Even more, he knew that if the youth minister eventually resigned and moved on to another opportunity, his youth ministry wouldn’t fall apart. The youth ministry was built around the adult volunteers, not around the gifts and talents of one youth minister.” (pg. 88)

SHIFTING TO SMALL-GROUP DISCIPLESHIP

“Find some holy men and women in your parish and have them draw a handful of teenagers into their lives for weekly mentoring. Simplify the ministry approach and focus on what is most effective. Think small, in order to grow big. Raise up saints (like Pope St. John Paul II) and change the world.” (pg. 91)

Chapter 8: Parent-Focused Youth Outreach

“How do I start small-group youth ministry? By evangelization and outreach through parents. Why is this effective? Because no one is more concerned about meeting the pastoral needs of young persons than their parents.” (pg. 94)

PARENTS ARE THE SOLUTION

“More and more, we are hearing about the need for family-based ministry. Yet I’ve seen a lack vision in parent ministries. Very few parishes have launched a parent ministry as part of their youth ministry (outside of mandated parent catechesis nights as part of sacramental formation). Even fewer are running successful parent ministries.” (pg. 95)

ENGAGING PARENTS WITHIN THEIR VOCATION

“Parents may be disengaged from the Faith, but they have not abandoned their primary vocation! They understand that their vocation is to love their children, and they take the responsibility very seriously...I know that the shortest path to conversion in parents’ hearts is through their relationship with their teenagers.” (pg. 97)

YOUTH OUTREACH THROUGH PARENTS

“Do the math: If there are 8 teens in every small group and you start 2 small groups with freshmen every year, you will have 64 teenagers engaged in high school youth ministry by the time the first two groups finish their senior year. That’s 128 parents engaged in ministry by the time all these small groups have gotten off the ground. That’s not just 64 teens participating in high school youth ministry. It’s 64 teens actively and intentionally disciplined by mentors within their small groups. Those 64 teens will have their basic needs met.” (pg. 98)

“I found that large-group youth activities (for the purposes of larger parish fellowship) were easier to execute once I had several small groups going well. All I had to do was tell my small-group mentors what we were going to do, and they would show up with their groups. It was an instant youth group. Teens were more willing to engage in activities at the parish (service, prayer, or fun) when they knew that their friends were coming.” (pg. 98)

A PRACTICAL STRATEGY

“It’s simple. The tasks of the youth minister then become facilitation of the process, engagement of the parents in mentoring the mentors of the small groups. Anything else done in youth ministry - retreats, mission trips, service projects, youth group gatherings - supplements the discipleship that happens in the small groups.” (pg. 100)

“When parents are engaged in this manner, outreach can grow exponentially. More importantly, parents are re-engaged in the process of forming their teenagers into disciples of Jesus Christ.” (pg. 100)

Chapter 9: The Recipe for Success

STRATEGIES, PITFALLS, AND OBSTACLES

“Here are a few key lessons I have learned about developing small-group ministry:”

- Start Small, Grow Big
- Establish Same-Gender Groups Of Five To Eight
- Let Discussion Develop Organically
- Create A Comfortable Environment
- “The worst environment for a small-group meeting is the parish or classroom. (pg. 103)
- Be Flexible With Scheduling Group Meetings
- Group Teens With Their Friends
- Engage Parents Every Week