How to Start a Youth Program

1. **Enlist the support of parish leaders.** A program is not “of the parish” if it does not have the approval and support of the parish leadership and community. Thus the first step in starting parish youth ministry is to get the pastor’s support along with the parish council and general congregation.

2. **Determine your purpose.** In other words, why do you want to start a youth ministry program and what do you want to accomplish? Make sure your mission is clearly stated and that you are “in the same ballpark” in terms of mission as the parish leadership and community. It might be helpful to write a mission statement or at least to articulate your goals.

3. **Assess the needs of the parish for youth ministry and the needs of youth.** Before you can begin programming, you have to have a sense of what you are programming for. Programs accomplish objectives and fulfill needs. So determine the needs. Do your teens need experiences with other Catholic youths because your parish is so small and your teens are a distinct minority in the public school? Is drug and alcohol abuse a big enough problem in your community that you feel the need to address it? Are few teens seen at Sunday Eucharist? Determine your parish needs, and then proceed programmatically from there.

4. **Gather a team of committed adults to help plan and carry out the parish youth ministry program.** Youth ministry will not sustain itself without a core group of committed adults. Youth ministry is a very relational ministry – committed Christians sharing their journey in faith with young people. The number of adults needed will vary with the number of youth to be served. A small parish might get by starting with a married couple who enjoy working with youth. There is no set age, gender, occupation or educational background for volunteer youth ministers. You need only find adults who love youth, love God, can establish a rapport with youth and want to minister in a team setting in the parish.

5. **Assess your resources and determine your resource needs.** After determining your people resources, survey the market for material resources to use in your program. There’s a ton of stuff available in the youth ministry publishing market. Find the materials that will help you build an effective program. Also, seek training and information on effective youth ministry. Start by contacting the Diocesan Youth Ministry Office at 614-241-2565.
6. **Schedule your events realistically.** Plan a calendar of events that does not exhaust your people or material resources. When making the calendar, ask the youth what they want to do and then plan accordingly, but be sensitive to their busy schedules and yours. A few events planned well are better than lots of events planned poorly because you and your team are overextended. Share responsibilities for particular events among the youth ministry team.

7. **Evaluate and adapt.** Periodically meet as a youth ministry team (adults and leadership youth) to evaluate your progress. Modify your program to improve where improvement is needed. Of equal importance is congratulating yourself on big and small successes.

8. **Pray and keep Jesus as the center.** Don’t worry about little setbacks. There will be lots of those. Keep focused on the larger mission and enjoy what you are doing.

**Helpful resources:**

Diocesan Youth Ministry Policies: [www.cdeducation.org/oym/](http://www.cdeducation.org/oym/)

Diocesan Youth Ministry link: [www.colsdioc.org/offices/OfficeofYouthandYoungAdultMinistry.aspx](http://www.colsdioc.org/offices/OfficeofYouthandYoungAdultMinistry.aspx)