

Organizing a Team for Youth Ministry

“Part of the vision of youth ministry is to present to youth the richness of the person of Christ, which perhaps exceeds the ability of one person to capture, but which might be effected by the collective ministry of the many persons who make up the church.”

A Vision of Youth Ministry, p. 24 as quoted in
Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth
Ministry, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops,
1997, p. 24.

It Takes a Team

It Takes a Village to Raise a Child

In *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry*, the U.S. bishops borrowed from this Ghanaian proverb and stated: “Comprehensive Ministry with Adolescents—It Takes a Whole Church” (p. 19). The Bishops wisely recognize that youth ministry cannot happen fully if only one or two adults in the parish community are involved in youth ministry. Youth ministry must involve a wide variety of adults and youth in a wide variety of leadership roles. Key to that understanding is the Coordinating Team for youth ministry—a team that sets the direction, advocates for youth in the parish and wider community, and plans the parish’s youth ministry efforts.

Community is Central

In defining youth ministry, the U.S. Bishops begin with the Christian community.

“Three interdependent and equally important goals guide the Church’s ministry with adolescents. These goals 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” (*Renewing the Vision*, p. 9).

Community is central to youth ministry—and not just in the way we often think. Community among youth has always been a central element of youth ministry, but we now understand that community also means that we use all of the gifts of our parish community to serve the needs of our young people (and all of the people of the community).

Embedded in Scripture and Church teaching is the understanding that all Christians have gifts for ministry and that there is mutuality to those gifts—complementary gifts, given by the Holy Spirit, for the common good of all.

“Through the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist, every Christian is called to participate actively and co-responsibly in the Church’s mission of salvation in the world. Moreover, in those same sacraments, the Holy Spirit pours out gifts which make it possible for every Christian man and woman to assume different ministries and forms of service that complement one another and are for the good of all” (Christifideles Laici, no. 20).

As Catholics, we need to take that call to community (for the good of all) very seriously if we want our youth ministry efforts to be an authentic witness to Jesus’ life and ministry. Jesus, God’s own son, did not act alone. He purposefully invited others to share in his ministry, invested time and energy into building up his team of disciples, engaged others who had gifts to share, and constantly found ways to involve people in his work. Jesus could have acted alone, but where would we be now if he had?

Part of the mystery of God’s great love for us is that he made each of us with gifts to share. Saint Paul helps us understand this abundance of gifts when he speaks of the Christian community as being the body of Christ. Paul says that every part of the body is important and that they must all work together. No part of the body is more important, and no part can say to the rest, “I don’t need you” (1 Corinthians 12:12-26).

If you look at the miracle of Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand, one of the central elements of that story is that Jesus did not act alone. He used the gifts that were already present within the gathered masses, and invited them to share from their abundance. In reflecting on this reading, Parker Palmer states: “He acted in concert with others and evoked the abundance of community” (The Active Life: Wisdom for Work, Creativity, and Caring, p. 136). Palmer goes on to speak of Jesus’ leadership:

“Jesus exercises the only kind of leadership that can evoke authentic community—a leadership that risks failure (and even crucifixion) by making space for other people to act. When a leader takes up all the space and preempts all the action, he or she may make something happen, but that something is not community. Nor is it abundance, because the leader is only one person and that one person’s resources invariably run out. But when a leader is willing to trust the abundance that people have and can generate together, willing to take the risk of inviting people to share from that abundance, then and only then may true community emerge” (p. 138).

If young people are to understand what it means to be gifted from God, called to share those gifts in service to others, and to live in community, then they will learn that (or not) from the ways in which they experience Church. Youth ministry should communicate in word and action to our young people and larger parish community— “we are so abundantly blessed by our God.” When a few leaders have to do everything, when those leaders are stressed and running low, and when

only those individual's gifts are made known to youth, our young people will not come to know the abundance of gifts within the community nor what true community looks and feels like.

Tapping into the Abundance

Youth ministry is at its best when enough time and energy is given to building a team of people who each add their own special gifts to the ministry effort. Some may have one specific event to which they devote their time. Others may help occasionally—when there is a need. Others are weekly or monthly volunteers—the cornerstone of most youth ministry efforts. Others support youth ministry with money, or resources, or prayer. There is one last group of people who share their gifts within youth ministry by making up a very important team within youth ministry—the Coordinating (Leadership) Team. All of these individuals are exercising important and life-giving ministry within the parish community—and demonstrating how abundantly blessed we are.

There are readers who are agreeing with all that has been said thus far, but who are asking with an open mind and a troubled heart, “But how do I get these volunteers?” This is the question asked by thousands of burned-out parish volunteers throughout the country and in some ways it is the wrong question. It is the wrong question because it is usually asked by people who are desperate to share the burdens of volunteering with others who are “stupid” enough to say “yes” like they, themselves, did long ago.

The right question might be, “How do I help people understand their own giftedness and create opportunities for those people to live out their baptismal call?” It sounds like a bit of a mouthful, but when our efforts are focused on helping Catholic Christians respond to the great gift of God's love in their lives, we will find the abundance of ministers that we are seeking. When we spend our time trying to find volunteers, it can be a fruitless and discouraging endeavor. Marlene Wilson, in her book, *How to Mobilize Church Volunteers*, rightly states that “the pews are filled with potential unrealized and energy untapped” (p. 21).

Wilson speaks about the reasons why so few people are involved in Church ministry. Among the reasons she states are:

- Most volunteer ministry jobs in the church are not clearly defined.
- Tradition often squelches new and creative ideas and approaches.
- Time and talent sheets have helped officially reject people's gifts every year.
- Clergy and lay leaders alike often are very poor delegators.
- The jobs to be filled often receive more attention than the people filling them.
- It is often difficult for members to describe
 - what they are good at.
 - what they are tired of doing.
 - what they don't like to do.
 - what they want to learn.
 - where they are being led to grow.

-when they need a sabbatical (p. 22).

I would add the following...

- Most Christians aren't invited to name their own experience of God and then act from it.

For each of those concerns, there is a solution. There are ways in which a parish community can truly tap into the potential that exists in each of us and uncover the abundance lying very near the surface of their parish community. But it will take some new ways of acting, new ways of thinking, and a community-wide leadership effort to be truly successful.

Mobilizing the Christian Community

There are solutions to the problems stated above. They take time, energy, and a clear vision of what it means to be church. If we want more people engaged in ministry at the parish (including, obviously, youth ministry), we need to attend to the following:

- **Clearly define leadership roles.**

Don't ask people if they can help in youth ministry. It is too big, ominous, and vague to get a positive response. When looking for ministry volunteers, write up job descriptions. Tell people what the job will entail, how much time it should take, how you will prepare them for the work, and what the rewards will be. Make the jobs small. One person doesn't need to be responsible for 10 parts of the big event. Break up jobs so that people can give a few hours, or a few days to youth ministry and contribute to an overall event.

- **Help people to use their gifts.**

Not everyone will be good at up-front roles. Not everyone can cook for the retreat. Not everyone can manage the youth ministry finances and have the checkbook balance at the end of the month. People have different gifts. Find out what people's gifts are and then invite them to use their own special talents to benefit others. But this means really getting to know the community—which will take time, energy, and attention. It is worth it!

- **Let people be.**

William Easum wrote a compelling book called *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers*. The title alone tells you what he thinks about tradition for tradition's sake. His subtitle, however, tells you how he thinks Church should work: "Ministry anytime, anywhere, by anyone." Too often the traditional ways of doing things at a parish are not the ways a new leader might proceed, so the individual doesn't offer his or her gifts, or those gifts are not appreciated if offered. Parishes need to be open to the new and creative ways that people are called to share their gifts. It may open up new ministry offerings at the parish, or it might change the way things have been traditionally done. If it is faithful, healthy, and authentic ministry, then we should embrace change and celebrate the movement of the spirit within the community.

- **Find new ways of inviting people to share their gifts.**

Too often time and talent surveys (or new parishioner packets) are full of requests for help that never get acted on. Don't hand it out unless you are prepared to invite and use the help that is offered. Another problem with most surveys is that it asks people to tell you how they want to volunteer within existing ministry efforts, but never gives the individual the chance to name their gifts, passions, experiences, and desires for involvement. Create a new time and talent survey for use at the parish that helps the individuals to express the gifts that they have been given, and name the ways they might be willing to use them within the Christian community. Then take those surveys and find ways to use those gifts within all the different ministries of the parish. Within youth ministry, invite current and new volunteers to tell you more about themselves. You might find the perfect person to direct the Stations of the Cross, or teach the youth how to quilt, or someone who can create great looking publicity for youth ministry.

- **Delegate!**

To be a ministry leader is by definition to be an empowerer. To empower someone is to give them the help, direction, and support that they need to succeed. Too many ministry leaders believe that their role is to make the ministry happen—with or without help. If you are a leader of youth ministry, a part of your job is to help other adults and youth to take on leadership within the community, uncover their own gifts, and develop new skills. When we hold on tightly to jobs or believe that others lack the experience or skill that we possess, we can never become good delegators. We will never hold on to ministry volunteers if they do not feel like they are able to make a substantial contribution to the ministry, and that will never happen if we hold on to all the decision making and important jobs. Share the jobs—and take the risk of failure.

- **Pay attention to ministry volunteers.**

There are times when we just really need someone to drive youth to the movie night. It is easy to be so happy to finally find someone to drive, that we forget that the person who said “yes” left their home, family, and other responsibilities to be a part of the event. It is easy to downplay the sacrifice of a volunteer driver when we think about all that we give up on a regular basis to do youth ministry events, but it does not, in fact, negate that driver's sacrifice. If we want people to invest in the ministry that we love and value, we have to value the service that others offer to us, and value the volunteers as individuals. When we pay attention to them—thank them, get to know them, recognize their gifts—we are more likely to encourage their continued involvement.

- **Help the Catholic community value their baptismal call.**

It is hard to tap into people's baptismal call if those same people do not believe that baptism is a call. As a Catholic community, we need to invest more time and energy in helping the “average pew-sitter” to know that they are called to ministry. Don't confuse this message, however, and assume that this means that all Catholics are called to give a certain number of hours of volunteer service at the Church. Many a good Catholic gives their service to the community, their family, and their workplace. This is good and holy work. However, all Catholics should be expected to work for the common good of all—and this can often be done through ministry within the parish. We need to highlight, celebrate, and affirm all the ways that Catholics build up the community, share their faith,

and work towards the common good if we expect Catholics to know that this is a part of their mission in life. It is hard to be a “pew-sitter” when all around you are people actively engaged in ministry. But when only a few people have all the leadership roles within the parish, it is easy to believe that only certain people are called to ministry.

• **Let no job be a life-sentence.**

Sometimes people volunteer at the parish and then keep the job for the next 30 years! Although we value the person who gives us 30 years of service, what that essentially says to the rest of the parish is two things:

- Volunteering is a life-sentence.
- There is no need for me—because the job is already taken.

Make all volunteer jobs have a start and stop date. I am not selected as the head of the youth ministry coordinating team for life—just for 2 years. And the person who had the job before me is going to help me through my first year, and the person who will replace me will shadow me during my second year. When jobs are seen as being continuous, it discourages people from participating. If someone wants to volunteer in youth ministry for the next 30 years, that is wonderful. But during that time they will have 100 different jobs, learn tons of new things, and move in and out of up-front leadership roles. That will be good for the ministry and the volunteer!

If you are not in a position to change the whole structure of the parish but you still need volunteer ministers for youth ministry, here are some very practical ways to proceed:

- Divide jobs into manageable pieces
- Write job descriptions for those roles—a couple of sentences at least— so that people will have a clear understanding of what is expected.
- Ask people (youth, parents, other volunteers, and parish staff) for recommendations, and make sure you move outside of the people you know to engage a whole new group of people in youth ministry.
- Interview potential volunteers about their interests, experiences, gifts, lives (over coffee, at the back of church, or in a more official way).
- Invite individuals, who will be long-term volunteers, to fill out an application, submit to a background check, and attend safe environment training.
- Share with potential volunteers the joys of youth ministry and the ways that they will grow through their involvement.
- Never stop looking for new people, and when you find someone, invite them personally.
- Mentor new leaders into their positions—don’t just throw them into roles they are unprepared to handle well.

A Variety of Roles

There are a variety of ways that adults and youth can contribute to the overall youth ministry efforts of a parish. In *Renewing the Vision*, the U.S. Bishops highlight four unique roles within youth ministry:

- Ministry Coordinator
- Coordinating Team (which we call: Leadership Team)
- Program Leaders
- Support Staff Let's look at each of these important ministry roles:

Coordinator of Youth Ministry

Every parish needs someone to coordinate youth ministry, although this is not always a paid position. The coordinator has primary responsibility for

- planning
- administration
- developing a leadership system
- advocating for youth.

Each of these roles benefits the parish in unique ways.

- Planning (in collaboration with the leadership team) ensures a well-rounded and solid youth ministry effort.
- Administration ensures the safety of the young people and volunteers, as well as the information the youth and their families need for participation.
- Developing a leadership system ensures that the abundance of the community is poured out in service to our young people.
- Advocacy ensures that young people are represented and heard within the parish and wider community. Advocacy also ensures that young people are fully engaged in all the ministries of the parish.

If no one serves in the role of Ministry Coordinator, it is easy for many of these tasks to remain undone. Too often we ask people who are fully engaged as program leaders to also serve in the role of ministry coordinator. This is very difficult because the coordination of youth ministry asks for different gifts and focused time—which isn't always possible when the demands of running a specific program or many different programs have the individual already fully subscribed. When we name someone as the Ministry Coordinator for youth ministry, we should be clear about our expectations for their work, and free them from other youth ministry commitments to create time for other important tasks. If the person is hired, we should ensure that they are already well prepared for the role, or take immediate steps to provide for that training.

Ministry Coordinator: Every parish needs someone to coordinate youth ministry, although this is not always a paid position. The role is essential, however, because the coordinator has primary responsibility for planning, administration, developing a leadership system, and advocating for youth. Each of these roles benefits the parish in unique ways. Planning (in collaboration with the Leadership team) ensures a well-rounded and solid youth ministry effort. Administration ensures the safety of the young people and volunteers, as well as the information the youth and their

families need for participation. Developing a leadership system ensures that the abundance of the community is poured out in service to our young people. And finally, advocacy ensures that young people are represented and heard within the parish and wider community. Advocacy also ensures that young people are fully engaged in all the ministries of the parish. If no one serves in the role of Ministry Coordinator, it is easy for many of these tasks to remain undone. Too often we ask people who are fully engaged as program leaders to also serve in the role of ministry coordinator. This is very difficult because the coordination of youth ministry asks for different gifts and focused time—which isn't always possible when the demands of running a specific program or many different programs have the individual already fully subscribed. As the bishops assert, "The Ministry Coordinator must always be qualified and well trained, as well as have an excellent reputation." Too often we throw people into the role of coordinator who may have a great reputation and are hard-working, loving adults, but who lack the understanding of, or the training for, the role of coordinator. When we name someone as the Ministry Coordinator for youth ministry, we should be clear about our expectations for their work, and free them from other youth ministry commitments to create time for other important tasks. If the person is hired, we should ensure that they are already well prepared for the role, or take immediate steps to provide for that training.

Coordinating (Leadership) Team

Renewing the Vision defines the Leadership team in this way: "A Coordinating (Leadership) Team, made up of adult and young people, may be formed to work with the ministry coordinator in organizing a comprehensive ministry with adolescents, by planning the overall ministry, developing a leadership team, identifying the resources of the faith community, and connecting the ministry with the other ministries and programs of the faith community" (p. 41). See the article, "Youth Ministry: It Takes a Team," for a full understanding of the roles of Coordinator and Coordinating (Leadership) Team (pp. 17-24).

The Role of the Leadership Team: As stated above, the Leadership Team is in charge of planning the overall ministry, developing the leaders, getting the resources of the community involved, and connecting youth ministry to the whole parish. This is not easily accomplished by one or two individuals. It truly takes a group effort. Specifically, the Leadership Team should do the following, with additional parish specific duties added on:

Planning

1. Create and communicate the vision for all aspects of youth ministry at the parish.
2. Coordinate schedules and programs for youth ministry.
3. Assess the needs of the youth and parents, and make recommendations for new or revised ministry efforts.
4. Evaluate current efforts regularly.

(The specific plans for activities are handled by the program leaders. This team sets the direction broadly and then counts on the program leaders to bring the plans to life.)

Leadership Development

5. Recommend and recruit program leaders and support staff for youth ministry.

6. Provide for training of youth ministry volunteers and staff.
7. Establishing (or updating) policies and procedures for youth ministry.

Resource Connectors

8. Make recommendations for resources, budget, and facilities.
9. Communicate with parish staff, parish council, and other leaders teams about youth ministry and the needs of youth.
10. Facilitate, when necessary, the finding of needed resources for youth ministry (time, talent, money, materials).

Connect Youth to Parish

11. Advocate for issues that affect youth in the parish and wider community.
12. Create avenues for youth involvement in parish events.

To perform at their highest level, the team should meet at least twice a season (every 3 months), but it is not necessary or effective to meet more than once a month. This team should not be involved in the day-to-day workings of youth ministry and therefore can leave planning meetings to the program leaders.

Putting the Team Together

In creating that group, look at a number of issues within the parish. If youth ministry is understood broadly in your parish, then youth ministry is the umbrella for all the ministry efforts directed at 6th-12th graders, including religious education, quinceañera preparation, confirmation preparation, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Camp Fire, youth groups, choirs, efforts aimed at specific cultural/ethnic groups, and many other parish initiatives. If this list represents the fullness of your current youth ministry efforts, it will be important to ensure that all of these different ministries are somehow represented on the Coordinating (Leadership) Team. One of the biggest mistakes that we can make is to create a Coordinating (Leadership) Team that really only focuses on one area of our ministry and ignores—or doesn't take seriously—other efforts. For instance, if your Leadership Team spends 90% of its time planning for a youth group (or Life Teen program, or religious education, etc.) and gives little or no attention to other youth events at the parish, it will be easy for the parish to assume that the Leadership Team is really just a planning team for that particular program. In too many parishes across the country, the Leadership Team is surprised to find out that some parishioners have started a Spanish-speaking youth group (or Boy Scout troop, or prayer group) without their knowledge. This situation highlights a problem in the parish. The problem is not that ministry is beginning without the Leadership Team's direction, because this is often a blessing. The problem might be that the Coordinating Team is not diverse enough to know that there was a need for a Spanish-speaking youth group in the parish. Or, perhaps, the problem might be that the Leadership Team has not established themselves as working broadly within the parish to address the needs of all the young people, so the pastor (or parish council) do not think of them as truly coordinating all of youth ministry at the parish, but just one small part of an overall effort. To be most effective, the Leadership Team must balance the needs of the current ministry programs within the parish while also attending to all the unmet needs that exist. Without that sense of balance, it is too easy for the team to lose their ability to

create new and important ministry efforts while planning for those that are already up and running.

In putting together your team, remember:

- **More is more**

The more people that you have involved in the planning of youth ministry, the more ideas, resources, people, and creativity will be available to you. You want to ensure that the group is large enough to represent the parish community, but small enough to work together well. This usually means about 8-15 people.

- **Diversity is very important**

The more diverse your group, the better it is. Make sure that you have people from all different walks of life, lots of different ages (including youth), and people with diverse connections to the parish and youth ministry. If your parish is culturally diverse, you want to make sure that this diversity is also represented on the Leadership Team. This is especially important if there are different language groups within youth ministry (a Spanish-speaking youth group and an English-speaking youth group, or other combinations).

- **Engage the right talent**

Because of the specific jobs of the coordinating team, it is really important to get the right people in these roles. The “right person” is someone who is good at long-term planning, has a good vision for youth ministry, can work well with a team, and is well connected within the parish community. Also important is that these individuals should like the behind-the-scenes work that is primary to the Coordinating Team.

- **Make the team credible**

Every organization, including a parish, has people who are held in esteem. These people have often proven themselves to be effective leaders and are therefore credible (and powerful). If the Leadership Team for youth ministry hopes to influence the parish structures and engage the larger community more fully in youth ministry, the team will need at least one or two of these “esteemed” members as a part of the team.

- **Balance the youth and adults on the team**

Young people have an important role to play within the Leadership Team. They have a right to be able to influence the direction of the ministry and to use their gifts and talents in service of their peers. However, it is important to note that many of the specific roles of this team (developing adult leaders, advocating within the parish) are not roles easily handled by youth alone. This is why it is important to ensure that at least half of the Leadership Team is adults.

- **Make the Coordinating Team a unique ministry opportunity**

Too often the Leadership Team is really just the collection of all the program leaders for youth ministry. These individuals are not only responsible for running all the programs but are now also asked to add additional responsibilities to their volunteer roles. Make the Leadership Team a specific role in youth ministry. Invite people to participate in this role, be clear about the expectations (number of meetings, training, etc.), and then invite others to be the program leaders. If a few members of the Leadership Team want to also be program leaders, that is not a problem, but don't make it an expectation of their volunteer service.

- **The Leadership Team is just another role within youth ministry**

It is easy to assume that the Leadership Team is “the role” to be involved in within youth ministry, but that is not correct. All four of the roles (support, program leaders, Leadership team, and coordinator) are vitally important. When we make the Leadership Team more important than the other youth ministry roles, it is easy for the wrong people to end up on the team. We should invite people to leadership based on their gifts, and if someone is great at being with young people and helping them to grow in faith, and happens to hate planning and meetings, they should be placed in program leadership, because that is where their gifts best serve youth ministry. Select your Leadership team members based on gifts, not years of service, or desire, or because it seems like the “coolest” job in youth ministry.

Getting Started

If you currently do not have a Leadership team or if your team is smaller or less focused than you believe it should be, use the following outline to create your team:

- 1. Determine the appropriate size.** If your parish is small (less than 600 families), you might be best served by a team of about eight persons. If your parish has between 600-1200 families, you might consider a team of between 8-12. If your parish is large, you will need a more diverse and therefore larger team—perhaps up to 15 people.
- 2. Determine adult/youth balance.** If your team has eight members, you might consider having 3-4 youth on the team. As your team gets larger, it is not essential to have it evenly split between youth and adults. By having more adults on a team of 15 (10 adults, 5 youth, for instance) you are providing more avenues into the parish community by the links that the adults will bring with them. Youth have an important role within the team, and it is essential to ensure that their voice is heard within the team. However, they often are still developing the skills necessary to be long-range planners, vision setters, and leadership developers. These skills might need to come from the adult members of the team, which is why it is important to be as focused on skills that members can bring instead of just the ages that they can represent.
- 3. Determine youth representation.** It is not necessary to have one youth from all the grades on your team, but you also don’t want them to only come from one grade. You also want to pay attention to the different schools that the young people attend and try to have a diversity of schools represented on the team. You might also want to work hard to have at least one young person on the team who is not a “regular” in youth ministry events. He/she will provide a unique insight into the programs you are suggesting and new ways to reach out to those youth who are less involved in gathered programs. Again, if your parish is culturally diverse, this should also be a factor in your choice. Once you have determined how many youth you will have on the team, you might be best served by looking at the specific gifts that young people have and then choosing those who are best able to fulfill the duties of these roles, while seeking diversity.
- 4. Determine adult representation.** There are a couple of competing factors in choosing adults. You want the group to be able to be connected to the youth ministry programs that exist, plus the parish, plus new communities or opportunities that are on the horizons. You also want a diversity of ages, marital status, ethnicity, and genders. And, of course, you want them to be good at the specific skills needed for this role. Once you have

determined the number of adult who should be on the team, you will want to be very choosy about the adults that will serve on this team. If you are not choosy enough, you will not serve the young people of the parish as well as you would like.

Selecting Members

To be most effective, this team should be created very thoughtfully. The current team, or the parish staff, or the parish council, or some other group of well-connected people should take some time to determine the make-up of the team. One parish, St. Joseph Parish in Marian, IL has a whole discernment process that they use each year. As positions become open, the current team discusses the current make-up of the team and what new voices they would like to add to the team. If a married couple is leaving the team, they might consider asking a new couple to replace them, but this couple might be young adults because the team has become filled with older parishioners and they want a young adult voice on the team. Or perhaps the member who is leaving also serves on the Parish Council, so the team will be looking for another strong parish leader to replace her. Once they have made some determinations about who they are looking for, they brainstorm possible candidates. Then someone from the current team calls the prospective members, invites them to consider the invitation, explains the position and time commitments, and asks them if they are willing to put themselves up for discernment. Those that are willing to be discerned fill out a brief application form. The current team then discerns from those candidates and selects the people they believe can best help the team in the coming years. This method has proven very effective for this parish for a number of reasons: it has raised the profile of the Leadership Team so that people are interested in serving and take it seriously, the intentionality with which they have picked members has ensured that the group is talented and competent, and the diversity of members has given them new insights and connections.

To create your own team, consider the following structure for terms:

- **Length of commitment.** You don't want to have to train a new team every year, so you want people to serve for more than one year. A three-year term for adults allows people to really function at a high level, but it is a long commitment. Another option is to have a two-year term, but allow people to serve two consecutive terms, for a total of four years if they choose. For youth, it is probably best to do a two-year term since it would be almost impossible to have youth commit for longer than that amount of time.
- **Rotation of terms.** Rotate positions on a continuous basis, so that you always have "old" team members on your Coordinating Team as well as bringing new team members on board. If you have a three-year term, one-third of the members rotate off each year. If you have a two-year term (with the opportunity to extend for 2 years), you may still only have about one-third of the members rotating off each year. Who, exactly, should be on a team? It is an impossible question to answer here because each parish is unique. The following information should give you a sense of who you should include on your team. The following is an example of what a team might look like:

Parish of 1200 families

The 12-member Leadership Team:

- Mary, part-time Coordinator of Youth Ministry (married, high-school age children)
- Fran, stipend coordinator for confirmation preparation (married, with young children)

- Stan and Maria (married couple, parents of high school age youth)
- Fred, volunteer in the youth group (single, young adult)
- Juan, dad of daughter who sings with the Spanish youth choir (single dad of a junior high youth)
- Mark, volunteer with Boy Scouts and Holy Name Member (widower, grown children)
- Marissa, former parish council president (married, grown children)
- Eliza, 8th grade student at parish school (Spanish-speaking parents)
- Al, 9th grade student at local all-boys Catholic high school
- Emily, 11th grade student at public high school (leadership teen in the youth group)
- Joseph, 12th grade student at public high school (leader at school, former altar server)

Assuming that this team was created new this year, and that the parish is planning on using a two-year term, it would be necessary, in the first year, to invite some people to serve a one-year term, so that a rotation of members can be created that will serve the team in the long term. By asking a third of this group to serve for a one-year term, you can be assured that you will have new members added to the team each year. In the second year, you can invite those who have already served for two year if they are interested in serving for another two. Some will probably say yes, and some will say no. This will create the diversity of rotation that is healthy for the group.

One can look at the Leadership Team as the Coordinator of each component of Youth Ministry as leaders of: Advocacy, Catechesis (DRE – Catechetical Leader), Community Life, Evangelization, Justice and Service, Leadership Development, Pastoral Care, Prayer and Worship. You can also add the Leader of Safe Environment Training and others to form your Leadership Team.

Orientation and Training

It is essential that a brand-new Leadership Team, or any new members on an existing team, receive the training and orientation that they need to be productive members of the team. One parish hosts a day-long training at the beginning of the year for everyone—new and old members. At the training, the Coordinator, in a very hands-on and interactive way, teaches the team about youth ministry (the goals, settings, and components), and invites all the team members to brainstorm ways that the parish is currently living out each of these goals and components. By the end of the morning, the team members not only know what the U.S. Bishops think youth ministry should look like, but they have examined their own parish’s efforts and brainstormed some new possibilities. The Coordinator then helps the team to plan for a season of ministry (a three-month plan for all the youth ministry efforts). Since the first meeting happens in late August, the team plans for the months of December, January, and February. The Coordinator reports that this method has worked extremely well because by the end of the day-long training, the team has learned a lot, has accomplished a great deal of work, and has created a community where both old and new members feel comfortable. Regardless of the style of orientation and training that you select, it will be essential that people know not only what is expected of them, but how they can contribute.

We cannot expect people to have the ability to contribute at the highest level if we do not equip them with the information they need. The Leadership Team, more than any other youth ministry

leaders, must have a clear understanding of a comprehensive vision of youth ministry and the current youth ministry efforts at the parish. Without that knowledge, it is unlikely that they will be able to provide direction for youth ministry.

If you want your team to function as a team and to take their role seriously, it will also be important to support the team members and affirm their contributions. Consider having a special blessing of the Leadership Team at Mass each year, or do it as a part of an overall blessing of parish (or youth ministry) volunteers. You can also recognize the contributions of members who are leaving the team through a party, “roast,” or a letter of thanks. Creating a sense of teamwork and community can go a long way towards helping people feel good about their ministry efforts, so don’t ignore the simply things that volunteers find supportive—food, drink, laughter, fun, and celebration.

The Collective Ministry of the Body of Christ

“Part of the vision of youth ministry is to present to youth the richness of the person of Christ, which perhaps exceeds the ability of one person to capture, but which might be effected by the collective ministry of the many persons who make up the Church” (A Vision of Youth Ministry, 1976, p. 24).

This statement is understated and profoundly true. It must be true that the “person of Christ” exceeds any one person’s ability to capture. Each of us contains a part of the truth of Christ. Each of us is uniquely qualified to be ourselves—sharing the very heart of whom we are and who God made us to be. Young people need to know us all—the cool and not-so-cool, the rich and the poor, the old and the young, the tall and the short, the popular and shy. If they only meet a few of us, they will never know the richness of Christ. It is only when the whole parish community leans on each other’s gifts that comprehensive youth ministry flourishes. The “might” and “perhaps” of the above quotation were a first (but tentative) step on a road we now know is the right direction. Our young people deserve the best that we have to offer them. Our adult parishioners also deserve the opportunity to grow from the gifts that young people do and will bring to the Church.

When we trust in the abundance that is already present in our parish community, great things happen. When we utilize the people of our parish, plug them into meaningful, yet not overwhelming roles within youth ministry, and when we honor the skills, gifts, and wisdom of young and old, we can’t help but create true community. Remember the words of Palmer Parker:

“But when a leader is willing to trust the abundance that people have and can generate together, willing to take the risk of inviting people to share from that abundance, then and only then may true community emerge” (p. 136).

Program Leaders

Program leaders are responsible for developing, promoting, implementing, and evaluating specific programs within youth ministry. For each and every program, try to create a team or coordinator for that event/activity. To make sure that your ministry is always expanding, ensure that

there are some new people on each team—youth and adults—every time you do something. If you are doing a movie night, ask a youth and adult to coordinate the event. They are in charge! If you are doing a weekend retreat, you will need a much larger team. When you are taking the young people to the homeless shelter, find the adults in the parish who already volunteer there, and invite them to help prepare your young people for the experience and accompany them to the shelter. You will probably want to have a few adults who are the “regulars” that go to many programs and know the young people well.

Program Leaders: Every program has leaders. In too many parishes, the program leaders for all the events are the same four or five people. Once they say yes to helping with one thing, it is assumed that they are willing to be leaders for every program that youth ministry is doing. It is far better to get a variety of people involved in many different programs. This allows young people to get to know a variety of Catholic Christians, and frees people up so that they can enter into ministry efforts with less stress and more joy. Program leaders are responsible for developing, promoting, implementing, and evaluating specific programs within youth ministry. For each and every program, try to create a team that has some new people on it—youth and adults. If you are doing a movie night, ask a youth and adult to coordinate the event. They are in charge! If you are doing a weekend retreat, you will need a much larger team, but make sure it includes some new people. When you are taking the young people to the homeless shelter, find the adults in the parish who already volunteer there, and invite them to help prepare your young people for the experience and accompany them to the shelter. You will probably want to have a few adults who are the “regulars” that go to many programs and know the young people well—but that doesn’t mean that there can’t be new people involved

Support Staff

There are always behind-the-scene roles that keep any ministry going. In youth ministry, these roles are often referred to as support roles, and could include helping with paperwork, phone calls, website design, desktop publishing, or finances. It might involve baking, shopping for supplies, and cutting out stars for this week’s activity. Also included in this category are the people who volunteer to drive to an event, or chaperone the overnight hours of a retreat, or are otherwise helpful to an event. Support can include prayer support, monetary support, and physical help. Support roles are great ways for people to make a contribution to youth ministry (and they don’t need to go through a background check to bake brownies for the retreat!).

Support Staff: Did you know that there is someone at your parish who cleans the linens, polishes the candlesticks, and collects the lost mittens and umbrellas after Mass? There are always behind-the-scene roles that keep any ministry going. In youth ministry, these roles are often referred to as support roles, and could include helping with paperwork, phone calls, website design, desktop publishing, or finances. It might involve baking, shopping for supplies, and cutting out stars for this week’s activity. Also included in this category are the people who volunteer to drive to an event, or chaperone the over-night hours of a retreat, or are otherwise

helpful to an event. Support can include prayer support, monetary support, and physical help. Too often in youth ministry the leaders never ask for this type of help, so they spend too many of their volunteer hours shopping, calling, or designing publicity, leaving them stressed during the time they spend with youth. There is no job that someone isn't able to do, and would probably be happy to do. You just have to find them and then ask them. The reason most often given for why people don't volunteer is, "I have never been asked." Support roles are great ways for people to make a contribution to youth ministry (and they don't need to go through a background check to bake brownies for the retreat!).

Support Staff could support either the Coordinator and Team (mailing, database support, publicity, etc.) or a Program (bakers for youth group gatherings, drivers for Six Flags, shoppers for religious education, etc.).

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