

PHILOSOPHY



YOUTH MINISTRY (Adapted from *Renewing the Vision*)

“As leaders in the field of the youth apostolate, your task will be to help your parishes, dioceses, associations, and movements to be truly open to the personal, social, and spiritual needs of young people. You will have to find ways of involving young people in projects and activities of formation, spirituality, and service, giving them responsibility for themselves and their work, and taking care to avoid isolating them and their apostolate from the rest of the ecclesial community. Young people need to be able to see the practical relevance of their efforts to meet the real needs of people, especially the poor and neglected. They should also be able to see that their apostolate belongs fully to the Church's mission in the world” (cf. Pope John Paul II, *Listen to the True Word of Life*, 1993.)

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. They express the Church's focus for ministry with adolescents, while encouraging local creativity in developing the programs, activities, and strategies to reach these goals.

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

Ministry with adolescents helps young people learn what it means to follow Jesus Christ and to live as his disciples today, empowering them to serve others and to work toward a world built on the vision and values of the reign of God.

The challenge of discipleship—of following Jesus—is at the heart of the Church's mission. All ministries with adolescents must be directed toward presenting young people with the Good News of Jesus Christ and inviting and challenging them to become his disciples. For this reason, catechesis is an essential component of youth ministry and one that needs renewed emphasis. If we are to succeed, we must offer young people a spiritually challenging and world-shaping vision that meets their hunger for the chance to participate in a worthy adventure.

We are confident that young people will commit themselves totally to Jesus Christ, who will ask everything from them and give everything in return. We need to provide concrete ways by which the demands, excitement, and adventure of being a disciple of Jesus Christ can be personally experienced by adolescents—where they tax and test their resources and where they stretch their present capacities and skills to the limits. Young people need to have a true opportunity for exploring what discipleship ultimately involves.

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This should include a partnership between youth ministers and other parish and diocesan ministries, offering young people an understanding of vocation that includes Christian marriage, generous single life, priesthood, religious life, diaconate, and lay ministry. Young people need to know and be known by the Church's ministers if they are to better understand how God is calling them to live as disciples. Faith-filled example by these ministers and active encouragement and invitations to consider a vocation to the priesthood and consecrated life will enable more to respond. Our young people will become truly convinced that "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13). Growth in discipleship is not about offering a particular program; it is the goal of all our efforts.

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

Young people experience the Catholic community of faith at home, in the parish (especially in youth ministry programs), in Catholic schools, and in other organizations serving youth. Ministry with adolescents recognizes the importance of each of these faith communities in helping young people grow in faith as they experience life in community and actively participate in the mission of Jesus Christ and his Church.

The Family Community—the Church of the Home

We believe that family life is sacred because family relationships confirm and deepen family members' union with God and allow God's Spirit to work through them. The profound and ordinary moments of daily life are the threads from which families can weave a pattern of holiness. Adolescents need to experience the Catholic faith at home and participate in the Lord's mission with their families.

Adolescents enhance family life with their love and faith. The new understandings and skills they bring home from parish and school programs can enrich family life. Their growth in faith and active participation in parish life can encourage the entire family to make the Catholic faith central in their lives. The Church can contribute significantly toward strong, life-shaping families

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for young people by equipping, supporting, and encouraging families with adolescents to engage in family faith conversations; to teach moral values; to develop healthy relationships and use good communication skills; to celebrate family rituals; to pray together; to participate in shared service activities; to explore and discuss vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life; and to nurture close parental relationships and parental faith. One of the most important tasks for the Church today is to promote the faith growth of families by encouraging families to share, celebrate, and live their faith at home and in the world.

The Parish Community

Parishes are communities of faith, of action, and of hope. They are where the Gospel is proclaimed and celebrated, where believers are formed and sent to renew the earth. Parishes are the home of the Christian community; they are the heart of our Church. Parishes are the place where God's people meet Jesus in word and sacrament and come in touch with the source of the Church's life. The parish community has a special role in promoting participation in the life, mission, and work of the faith community.

First, parishes "should be a place where [young people] are welcomed, grow in Jesus Christ, and minister side by side with the adults of the community" (A Message to Youth). In parishes, young people should feel a sense of belonging and acceptance as full-fledged members of the community. Young people are more likely to gain a sense of identity in the community if they are regarded as full-fledged members.

Second, parishes "should have programs for [young people] that recognize [their] special talents and role in the life of the Church. [They] bring to the parish community youthfulness, energy, vitality, hopefulness, and vision" (ibid). In parishes, young people need to have a wide variety of opportunities to use their gifts and to express their faith through meaningful roles. They will develop a spirit of commitment within a community only through actual involvement in the many ways the Church exercises and carries out its mission. Especially crucial is the interaction with those who have made a lifetime commitment to serving the Church as priests, sisters, brothers, deacons and lay ecclesial ministers; young people need to know that such service is

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both rewarding and fulfilling.

Third, if parishes are to be worthy of the loyalty and active participation of youth, they will need to become "youth-friendly" communities in which youth have a conspicuous presence in parish life. These are parish communities that value young people—welcoming them into their midst; listening to them; responding to their needs; supporting them with prayer, time, facilities, and money. These are parish communities that see young people as resources—recognizing and empowering their gifts and talents, giving them meaningful roles in leadership and ministry, and encouraging their contributions. These are parish communities that provide young people with opportunities for intergenerational relationships—developing relationships with adults who serve as role models and mentors. In short, "youth-friendly" parish communities make a commitment to young people and their growth.

The Catholic School Community

As a faith community, Catholic schools provide young people with opportunities to deepen their understanding of the Catholic faith, to experience life in a Christian community, to participate actively in the mission of Jesus Christ and his Church, and to celebrate their Catholic faith. Catholic schools create a living faith community in which young people are empowered to utilize their gifts and talents and to live their faith through a variety of meaningful roles in the school, the parish, and in the Church at large. Catholic schools provide a unique opportunity for young people to experience the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to bring Catholic beliefs and values into their lives and the world. Campus ministry provides an essential element in the ministerial life of the Catholic school community and campus ministry fosters the faith development of young people and the entire school community through effective religious education and a variety of programs and activities, such as service projects, retreats, prayer services and liturgies, spiritual formation programs, leadership training, peer ministry, and vocation ministry that includes education, encouragement, and invitation.

In partnership with parents and parishes, Catholic schools prepare young people to become full and active members of the Catholic Church. Families, parishes, and Catholic schools

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continuously need to find ways to strengthen this partnership so that the lives of all young people are enriched and the resources of the Catholic community are wisely used. Some of these activities can be adapted for parish youth ministry.

The Youth-Serving Organizational Community

Catholic leaders in certain youth-serving organizations, both within and outside of parishes, have a unique opportunity of reaching Catholic adolescents and bringing them into communion with the greater Catholic community. Through church-developed religious programs and activities, Catholic lay leaders and chaplains/moderators guide youth and act as mentors in their faith development, particularly in learning the gospel message and the basic teachings of the Church. These organizations are communities that help young people deepen their relationship with God and develop a spirit of joyful giving. These organizations afford an environment where adolescents can learn and can practice leadership skills and can focus on ethical decision making. Often, these organizations are able to reach at-risk youth and to provide much needed care and support. Wherever possible, it is important that these organizations provide adolescents the opportunity to participate in the life of their parish and diocese.

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

Ministry with adolescents promotes the growth of healthy, competent, caring, and faith-filled Catholic young people. The Church is concerned for the whole person, addressing the young people's spiritual needs in the context of his or her whole life. Ministry with adolescents fosters positive adolescent development and growth in both Christian discipleship and Catholic identity. Promoting the growth of young and older adolescents means addressing their unique developmental, social, and religious needs and nurturing the qualities or assets necessary for positive development. It also means addressing the objective obstacles to healthy growth that affect the lives of so many young people, such as poverty, racial discrimination, and social injustice, as well as the subjective obstacles to healthy growth such as the loss of a sense of sin, the influence of values promoted by the secular media, and the negative impact of the consumer mentality.