

SECTION ONE – Laying the Groundwork for Effective Youth Ministry

Where to Begin

Like any major work, this document can be overwhelming – especially if your parish or high school is just beginning to tackle youth ministry seriously. Try this as a “to do” list when reviewing the document:

1. Familiarize yourself with the policies. All policies are bolded and boxed and appear in red ink (online) and can be found throughout this document. All policies can also be found in Appendix Three. The policies will help you establish effective youth ministry according to diocesan guidelines. If your ministry with young people is already off and running, review the policies to see where adjustments may need to be made to come into compliance with diocesan guidelines.
2. Review the Leading Change Program, as outlined in Section Three.
3. Establish a Youth Ministry Leadership Committee as outlined in Appendix Two.
4. Complete the Parish Self Assessment found in Appendix One. This will enable your team to see how strong your ministry with young people already is – even if you think it's weak.

Parish Youth Ministry: Relationships not Programs

In this document we have outlined the standards that make youth ministry effective and have included an assessment tool parishes can use to see effective ministry is in their community. The components of youth ministry are named and outlined. Practical advice is given. The ministry of athletics is well represented here, with the entire athletic handbook appearing in Section 9. We have covered essential issues facing youth ministry leaders, such as prayer, adolescent catechesis, and pastoral care.

It is essential to remember that this document is not static in nature. This document is not complete until you, the clergy and lay people in the parish and school communities, read it, embrace it, and work with others to put it into action. Even then the document will not be final. There will always be more resources to add and policies to update. This truly is, and will continue to be, *a work in progress*.

Please be sure to always keep in mind that youth ministry is more about reaching young people than gathering them. This document provides tools to assist you and other adult leaders in effectively reaching out to young people while providing guidelines and policies for those times when young people gather together. Youth ministry at its best is a relationship based on the needs of young people in the parish. This document will help those in leadership identify those needs, build these relationships, and effectively minister to all young people in the community.

The document is not meant to provide an answer to every situation in every setting. One model will never suit all settings. One vision, however, should guide all those in ministry in establishing effective youth ministry. This document seeks to articulate that vision. It will not cover everything, nor is it intended to. Please let CYM know if you discover glaring errors, omissions, or problems.

The Church Is Not A Place Where..., It's A People Who...

Youth ministry, at its core, is about a community being in relationship with young people. Words like "youth group" and "CYO" have given way to new phrases like "youth ministry team" and "a comprehensive mindset." Ministry with young people requires the involvement of the entire community. We can no longer depend on a youth minister as a "do-er" of the ministry, where the challenge of working with young people rests solely on his or her shoulders. Today it's everyone's job. The comprehensive approach puts the emphasis on the process. Youth ministry happens most effectively when the community supports a team of adults and youth in taking responsibility for developing ministry to, with, by and for young people. This is where a Youth Ministry Leadership Committee comes into the picture.

Youth Ministry Leadership Committee

Once upon a time the youth minister relied on a few steady volunteers who were constantly present. With the advent of the Youth Ministry Leadership Committee (YMLC), many adults representing the multiple facets of parish gather at the same table to discuss ideas, plan for responding to the needs of young people, and strategize ways to best engage young people in the life of the parish. Each member of the team brings a unique perspective and a special giftedness to the table, and is an essential part of a parish's relationship with the young people within its ranks.

The YMLC may include parents of high school and middle students, and provisions should be made to include a representative for students who are home-schooled. Other members include adult leaders in scouting, athletics, other parish ministries, and the parish and local community at large. The YMLC is itself a work in progress and its membership should be consistently reexamined to ensure that it adequately represents and addresses the needs of the young people of the parish.

For a more complete description of the YMLC membership and roles and responsibilities, please see Appendix Two.

If there's A Team, Who's In Charge?

Every team needs a captain. Even though a chair is selected by its members, the parish needs one person – or a few if the parish is very large – to animate the response to young people that is articulated by the YMLC. In other words, the YMLC members give advice, they strategize and they plan. The coordinator of youth ministry empowers and coordinates ministries to happen. The team is the "keeper of the vision" while the coordinator works with other volunteers who also work directly with the young people.

What It Means to be Comprehensive

1.1 Every parish is to provide comprehensive youth ministry.

Comprehensive Youth Ministry, at its heart, is a parish's adults in relationship with *all* young people. This requires the following:

- Parish leadership is to be aware of the needs of young people and committed to an appropriate response. This awareness should stem from a regular assessment of the needs of young people.
- A pattern for gathering with youth on a regular basis.
- Scheduling special events and activities for young people.
- Intentional methods for providing adolescent catechesis.
- Non-gathered ways to connect with youth.
- Ways to connect young people to the life of the parish, especially the liturgical celebration of the parish community.
- A family-friendly, inter-generational environment in which young people feel welcomed, supported, and nurtured.
- Inclusion of young people in leadership and service roles in the parish community.

Overall, a parish's approach programmatically should effectively address the eight components of comprehensive youth ministry as outlined in *Renewing the Vision*, the U.S. Bishops' document outlining the church's vision of ministry to, with, by, and for young people.

Recognizing that the term Comprehensive Youth Ministry is new to many people, it is important to distinguish the difference between this and the more traditional "youth group" model of ministry. To that end, we offer the following points of discussion from the booklet *Celebrate Youth: Renewing our Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry* (Center for Ministry Development, 1998).

Comprehensive ministry with younger and older adolescents is goal-directed.

The three goals articulated in *Renewing the Vision* (published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1997) give ministry with adolescents a focus, direction, and purpose. A goal-directed ministry refocuses attention away from programs and activities and toward the primary purposes of youth ministry. It recognizes that everything in youth ministry works toward the accomplishment of these goals. Focusing on goals opens up avenues for creativity and imagination, envisioning a variety of ways to achieve the three goals of youth ministry.

Comprehensive ministry with younger and older adolescents integrates diverse activities into a larger, integrated framework.

Renewing the Vision presents a framework that integrates eight ministries of the Church with four essential elements or settings for ministry with adolescents – youth, family, church community, and civic community. This integration allows for the development of programs and strategies that adapt to diverse youth and families in our community.

Comprehensive ministry provides concrete things that the church can do to nurture adolescent faith growth and make a lasting difference in the lives of adolescents.

Renewing the Vision utilizes contemporary research to present specific faith building assets that name what the Church seeks to achieve in the lives of young people. *Renewing the Vision* advocates eighteen assets as a foundation for healthy faith development in adolescents. These eighteen assets provide specific directions for effective pastoral practice with adolescents and give focus to the content of programs and activities that are offered within a comprehensive ministry.

Comprehensive ministry engages the power and resources of the intergenerational community of faith.

The whole community by its way of learning together, living together, serving together, praying together, and celebrating together helps young people become disciples of Jesus Christ and members of the Catholic community. Comprehensive ministry integrates youth ministry and young people into the larger faith community and focuses energy on building intergenerational relationships between young people and the community. *Renewing the Vision* advocates a community and intergenerational focus for ministry with adolescents.

Comprehensive ministry partners with parents in developing the faith life of adolescents by empowering families to share, celebrate, and live the Catholic faith at home and in the world.

Comprehensive ministry supports families as faith communities through family-involving programs and at-home activities. To empower families to share, celebrate, and live their faith at home and in the world, youth ministry designs family-friendly and family-involving ministries and programming, and provides families with a variety of home strategies and activities.

Comprehensive ministry cooperates with community leaders and organizations to promote positive adolescent development and create healthier communities for all young people.

Renewing the Vision advocates a collaborative approach between the church and community organizations.

Comprehensive ministry empowers everyone in the faith community to use his or her gifts, talents, and resources in ministry with adolescents, helping the entire community assume responsibility for ministry with adolescents.

Comprehensive ministry mobilizes all of the resources of the faith community. Every member of the community has a role to play and special skills, gifts, talents, and resources that can enrich and expand ministry with adolescents. Comprehensive ministry with adolescents also involves adult and youth leaders in a variety of specialized roles necessary for effective ministry. Many of these leaders will be involved in direct ministry with adolescents, others will provide support services, and yet others will link the ministry effort to the resources of the broader community.

What is Renewing the Vision?

Renewing the Vision is the framework for Comprehensive Youth Ministry, as presented and published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1997. It is the guiding force for youth ministry in the United States today and serves as the framework for this document.

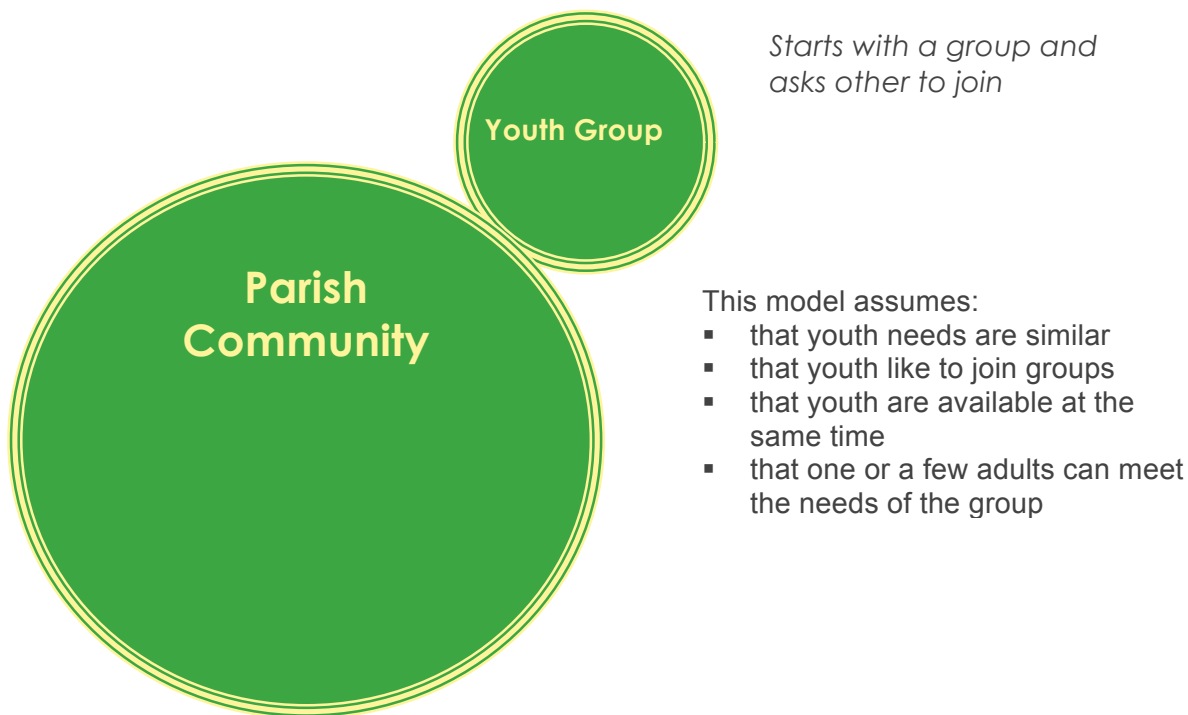
According to *Renewing the Vision* youth ministry is:

- Drawing youth into the adventure of discipleship.
- Helping youth to make the right connections.
- Growing young disciples.
- Responding to the needs and including the gifts of youth.
- Seeing youth as gifted and growing.
- Seeing parents as partners.
- Seeing our parish as ready and able to respond to youth.
- Seeing the wider community as collaborators and resources.
- Seeing youth ministry as a relationship, not just a program.
- Investing in youth with our time, attention, and resources.

Models and Mindsets

In the old model (i.e., “youth group model”), youth ministry was often an oasis from parents. Today youth ministry is a support, partner, and resource for families. A Coordinator of Youth Ministry is just that, a coordinator of ministries to, with, by and for young people. He or she facilitates the gifts of the entire parish in organizing and empowering the community to minister to and with young people with the advice, input, and assistance of the YMLC.

Youth Group Model or “One-Eared Mickey”



The youth group model was, at once time, consistent with the needs of the young people. Programs were established first and then people in the parish were invited to participate. This document assumes that programs are made for people; people are not made for the programs. Therefore, comprehensive youth ministry recognizes the changing needs and life situations of young people and their families.

This document, we pray, will help establish permeable boundaries between all those who work with young people so that all young people can benefit from the gifts of those whose experience and passion can be such great teachers.

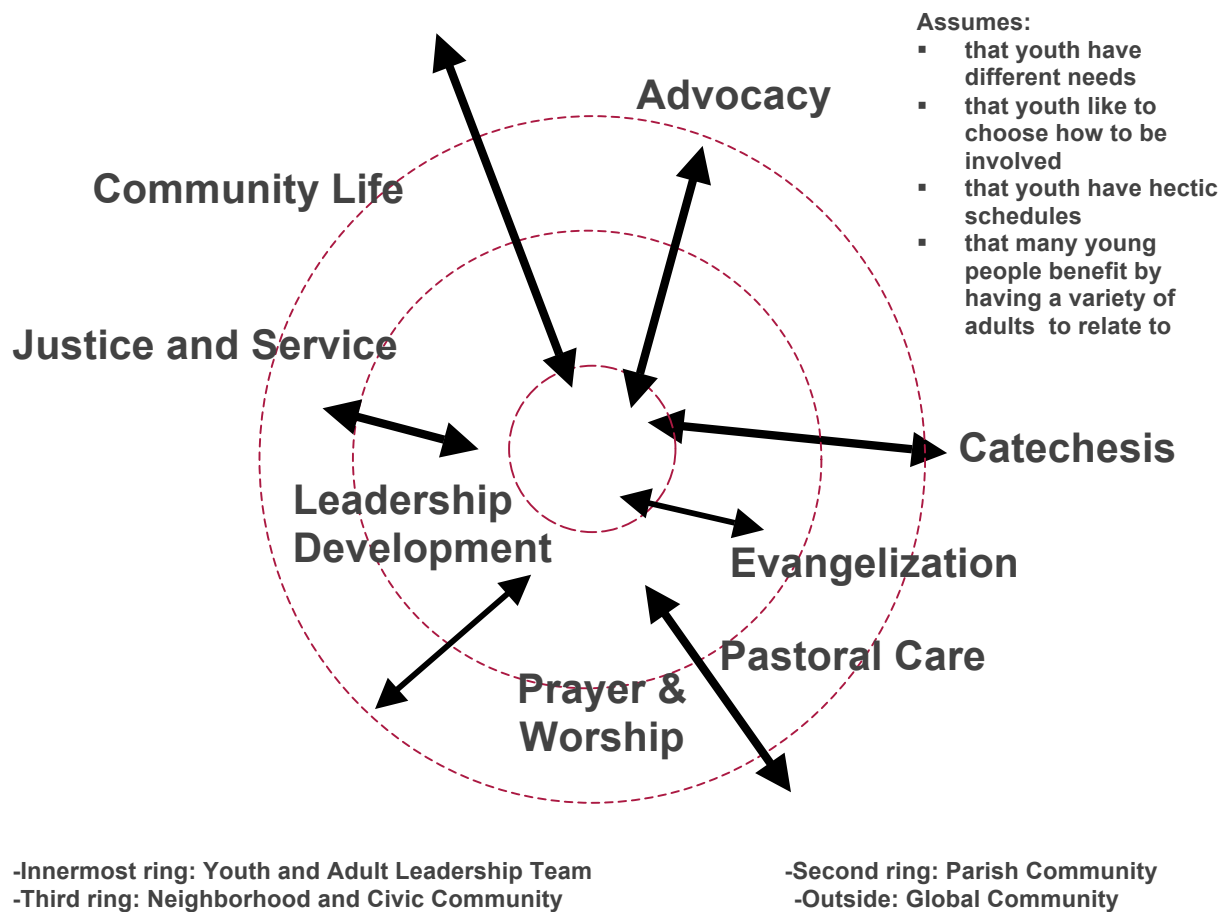
So What Is a Coordinator of Youth Ministry?

Suppose one Sunday at Mass the pastor wanted to give a special blessing for the Coordinator of Youth Ministry. For the sake of our story, we'll call him Tom. The pastor invites Tom up to the front of the church and asks him to say a few words about himself and the work he'll be doing. Tom introduces himself to the parish. Then he asks all those who have children to stand. The parents and grandparents, young and old, stand in their places. Then he repeats the invitation, this time asking all those who coach to stand. A third time Tom addresses the parishioners and asks all those who encounter young people in their jobs to stand. Finally, Tom asks all those who encounter young

people at Mass or at parish functions to stand. Tom has everyone in the assembly, standing, so he turns to the pastor and says, "Father, the youth ministers are ready for their blessing."

In a parish where ministry to young people is effective, everyone in the parish shares responsibility for ministry to, with, and for young people. It is everyone's job to include young people in the life and mission and ministry of the parish. It's the Coordinator's job to make sure it happens. The Coordinator of Youth Ministry literally *coordinates* the parish's response to the needs of the young people.

**The New Model:
A Model of Comprehensive Youth Ministry**



A Guide to this Document

Parish youth ministry leaders that follow the policies in this book and understand the commentary surrounding each will be well on their way to providing effective youth ministry for their young people.

All questions in the Youth Ministry Effectiveness Tool (Appendix One) are based on the policies outlined in this manual. Parishes that follow the policies and understand their meaning should score well on the Effectiveness Tool.

All policies are written in bold type and appear in red (in the online version). All policies are numbered. The first number of each policy indicates the section in which the commentary for the policy may be found.

Appendix One is the Youth Ministry Effectiveness Tool. Parish communities are encouraged to complete this assessment tool to discover how effective their ministry to, with, and for young people is (or can become) in their parish. Catholic Youth Ministry staff can guide pastors, Youth Ministry Leadership Committees, or CFCs in this important process.

Appendix Two contains supporting documentation for policies and guidelines as well as other useful information (i.e. resources for supporting your volunteers).

Appendix Three is a listing of all policies. It can be used as a quick reference for this manual.

Appendix Four is a reprint of all checklists found in Section Three of the *For the Sake of God's Children* manual. These checklists are referenced throughout this manual, thus they are included here for easy reference.