

SECTION TWO – Youth Ministry Today

Introduction

Changing times demand new approaches. What worked in one generation does not necessarily guarantee success in the next generation. This is especially true in ministry with youth. Every generation of leaders in ministry with youth is confronted with the same challenge: to discern the changing needs and life situations of youth and their families and **reinvent their vision and strategies**. Given the speed of change in our time, the need to reinvent our approach to ministry with youth is particularly pressing.

The developmental needs of adolescents provide a basis for reinventing our approaches. The social changes affecting the United States give us additional reasons for reinventing our vision and strategies. Consider this brief list of the social changes affecting young people today:

Changing Family Life: the increase in diversity of family structures, including blended families and single-parent families; the rise in dual career families; the busyness and stress of contemporary family life

Changing Economics: the rapidly changing economic scene causing unemployment, career dislocation, and financial stress; the growing number of families without health care; the growing number of families living in poverty

Changing Communities: the concern for the quality of schooling; the concern for safe communities, especially in the face of violence and gangs; fragmentation and competition among community organizations designed to serve youth (schools, religious organizations, youth organizations); diminished funding for community organizations serving youth

Changing Culture: the multicultural nature of U.S. society; the increasing diversity of value systems and lifestyles; the increasing impact of all forms of media and the images and messages they communicate

The challenge for churches is immense, but the work must begin. We need a model to guide our thinking and planning for this new generation of youth and their families.

What essential characteristics should a model of youth ministry include?

It must promote holistic growth. We need a model of youth ministry that corresponds to a contemporary understanding of adolescent development and faith growth (see “Adolescents Today” in the Leadership Development component of **Youth Ministry Access**); Specifically one that promotes the internal assets and faith life of youth, while strengthening the external, community supports for positive youth development. We need a model that attends to a wide spectrum of youth needs and that is also attuned to the distinct developmental and social needs of young and older adolescents.

It must be family- and community-centered. We need a model of youth ministry that moves beyond traditional youth-only programming to include ministry with families, incorporation of young people into all aspects of church life, and partnerships with other churches/synagogues, schools, and community agencies in a common effort to promote positive youth development. Youth ministry needs to situate itself within this broader context.

It must be flexible and inclusive. We need a model of youth ministry that responds creatively and flexibly to **all** the youth of the parish, not just the ones who attend programs. We need a model that is designed to enlarge the number of approaches and methods used to minister with youth so that all youth can be reached through a parish's youth ministry. Gone are the days when one program structure can respond to all the needs of youth.

It must put people first. We need a model of youth ministry that recognizes the changing needs and life situations of young people and their families and places this reality ahead of program structures. **Programs are made for people; people are not made for programs.** We need a flexible, adaptable model of youth ministry that can be tailored to address the real needs and life situations of today's young people and their families in our particular community setting.

It must be theologically sound. We need a model of youth ministry that is well grounded in the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ and his Church. We need a model that will provide a clear understanding of youth ministry as integral to the life of the church.

The Church Has Accepted the Challenge

The Catholic Bishops of the United States published *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* (RTV) to publicly renew their commitment to young people and to help parish communities make room for a new generation of disciples. *Renewing the Vision* affirms the 1976 *Vision of Youth Ministry* document and brings together all of the experiences, resources, the joys and struggles of the last two decades of youth ministry.

Renewing the Vision is most important an affirmation of the faith, gifts, energy and fresh ideas of young people... It is a call to empower young people for the mission they have been given by the Lord Jesus. (RTV 2)

In this document, the Bishops celebrate the growth of the church's ministry with youth and call the church community to reach out to young people with renewed zeal. The Bishops ask us to consider the reality of adolescence in our culture; youth today face many challenges as they grow to adulthood. They also share with us the good news of positive youth development and the proven effectiveness of youth ministry efforts. Most

of all, they call the whole community to join in the effort to help young people grow as disciples. All of us contribute to this effort, as individuals, as families, as community organizations, as service groups and as a parish community.

Over the past two decades, some parish youth ministry efforts have focused on a few key leaders who work to organize one or two ministry programs. In our renewed vision, we open up the possibilities for ministry by stretching previously held notions and limits. We call this a comprehensive mindset. Our mindset, or vision for ministry, is comprehensive because we make room for different kinds of youth, different ministry responses and different resources. When we adapt a comprehensive mindset, we see the resources of our community. We will see the alternative ways to meet our goals. We will begin to see problems as opportunities.

See the Systems

If we only see young people and not their families, culture, schools, and community connections, then our view is not wide enough. We need to see the whole community and all of the socializing influences upon young people.

See the Resources

If we only see scarcity and deficits—a lack of money, a lack of volunteers for programs, a lack of supplies, a lack of support, then our view is not big enough. We need to see the strengths, the possibilities and the resources in our community that can work together for young people.

See the Alternatives

If we see only one way to reach our goals, or one program model or one leadership style, then our view is not big enough. We need the many and varied ways that we can reach our goals for ministry with adolescents. We are only limited by our imagination and creativity.

See Problems as Opportunities

If we see “unsolvable” problems as a taken-for-granted part of ministry that we must either live with or struggle against, then our view is too limited. We need to see problems as nothing more than an opportunity in work clothes. The seeds of change and growth are in the problems we encounter. Remember that every time we make changes, we create new problems along with the solutions. This is normal. Each new set of challenges calls us to new creativity and collaboration. Our ministry with youth is a journey, not a destination.

A Framework for Comprehensive Ministry with Adolescents

*The comprehensive approach is not a single program or recipe for ministry. Rather, it provides a way for integrating ministry with adolescents and their families into the total life and mission of the Church, recognizing that the whole community is responsible for ministry with adolescents and their families. The comprehensive approach uses **all** of our resources as a faith community—people, ministries, programs, resources—in a common effort to promote the three goals of the Church's ministry with adolescents. The goals for ministry with adolescents help to keep our vision focused on the objectives. The themes provide a continuous thread that ensures that ministry with adolescents utilizes all available resources and is all inclusive. The components highlight specific areas of ministry for a comprehensive approach. By offering this framework we seek to provide direction to the Church's ministry and affirm and encourage local creativity. (RTV 19-20)*

In *Renewing the Vision*, the United States Catholic Bishops offer a framework for Catholic youth ministry. This vision does not provide a program model or a prescriptive method for developing ministry. Rather, it offers a framework, a structure that has room for a variety of parishes to develop youth ministry in a variety of ways. Like the blueprints for building a home, this framework provides important elements that guide us as we create youth ministry. The framework for Catholic youth ministry includes the following five elements:

- Definition
- Goals
- Themes
- Ministry Components
- Ministry Settings

Definition of Catholic Youth Ministry

The definition of youth ministry offered by the Bishops is formed by our love for and our commitment to youth: youth have needs we care for and gifts to share. "Youth ministry is the response of the Christian community to the needs of young people and the sharing of the unique gifts of youth with the larger community" (RTV 1).

The Bishops remind us to see within youth the incredible potential and capacities they have now and to respond to their present and real needs. Youth ministry does not exist because youth are particularly troubled or needy. Youth are growing in ways intended by our loving God. They are encountering the joys and the challenges of life as adolescents in our time. They have wonderful gifts to offer in the midst of their growing pains. **We minister to youth because we are church and we follow the pattern of Jesus: we respond to needs and empower youth to use and share their gifts.**

Three Goals of Catholic Youth Ministry

In *Renewing the Vision*, three goals serve as directions for ministry with youth.

Goal 1: Empowerment

To empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today. (RTV 9)

We know that young people are seeking. Youth seek to find the adventure of their lifetime. They look for a way to contribute something important to the world. They look for a cause to belong to, a cause to throw their life into. As a faith community, we offer young people the challenge of life as a disciple of Jesus Christ. This effort includes...

- providing a spiritually challenging and world shaping vision for life
- evangelizing youth, drawing youth into personal relationship with Jesus Christ
- calling youth to discipleship
- providing opportunities for youth to join in service, ministry and leadership
- providing catechesis for youth
- helping youth to explore their vocation

Goal 2: Participation

To draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission, and work of the Catholic faith community. (RTV 11)

We know that young people are striving to be part of a community. They long to belong to others. They want to feel connected to people with whom they will feel safe. As a church, we offer young people community. We help them to become more connected in their own families, in our parishes and in the wider community.

Renewing the Vision identifies four important faith communities for young people: the family, the parish, the Catholic school, and the youth-serving organization. We help youth connect to a network of support in their various communities. This effort includes...

- supporting families of youth by providing resources, programs and information
- integrating youth into the life of the parish community
- promoting belonging in the Catholic school community
- building participation in youth-serving organizations

Goal 3: Growth

To foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person. (RTV 15)

We know that young people are growing. This time in their life brings dramatic physical, social, intellectual and spiritual changes. As the body of Christ, we offer youth a place to grow. We offer experiences and opportunities for youth to grow in positive ways, to learn their faith and use their gifts in service to others. As a community, we use our

creativity and resources to respond to youth that are seeking, striving and growing. We foster this growth through our active engagement of youth in the life of our communities. We seek to...

- support the development of healthy, competent, caring, and faith-filled youth
- address their unique developmental, social and religious needs
- foster positive adolescent development
- promote Catholic identity
- address the obstacles and challenges to healthy development

Seven Themes of Comprehensive Youth Ministry

The themes of a comprehensive vision presented in *Renewing the Vision* provide a guide for ministry development that helps us to use all of our resources and to be inclusive and responsive in our ministry efforts.

Developmentally Appropriate

Effective ministry responds to the developmental growth of young and older adolescents by developing programs and strategies that are age-appropriate and strategically focused to contribute to the positive development of youth.

Family Friendly

Effective ministry recognizes the family as an important setting for ministry and provides links between the programs of youth ministry and the family home through the sharing of information, inclusive programs and resources.

Intergenerational

Effective ministry utilizes the intergenerational parish community by developing shared programs and by connecting youth to adults in the community.

Multicultural

Effective ministry provides for ministry to youth in the context of their culture and ethnic heritage. Effective ministry also promotes cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

Community-wide Collaboration

Effective ministry promotes collaboration with leaders, agencies and congregations in the wider community. This collaboration includes sharing information, sponsoring programs and developing advocacy efforts.

Leadership

Effective ministry mobilizes the people of the faith community to become involved in youth ministry efforts by providing for diverse roles and commitments for adults and youth.

Flexible and Adaptable Programming

Effective ministry provides flexible and adaptable program structures and ministry responses to address the variety of youth and families in our communities.

Eight Components of Comprehensive Youth Ministry

These components provide a framework 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. (RTV 26)

The components support and enhance each other. Our ministry becomes more effective when we work to balance our ministry response across the eight ministry areas. This balance is not necessarily achieved by developing separate ministry programs in each component; sometimes a single program, such as a retreat, incorporates several ministry components. We look for balance over a season or year of ministry to determine our ministry response in these components. (The following descriptions of the eight components are excerpted from pages 26-47 of *Renewing the Vision*.)

Advocacy

The ministry of advocacy engages the church to examine its priorities and practices to determine how well young people are integrated into the life, mission, and work of the Catholic community. It places adolescents and families first by analyzing every policy and program—diocesan, parish, domestic, and international—for its impact on adolescents and families. Poor, vulnerable, and at-risk adolescents have first claim on our common efforts. The ministry of advocacy fights economic and social forces, which threaten adolescents and family life, such as poverty, joblessness, lack of access to affordable health care, lack of decent housing, and discrimination. The ministry of advocacy supports policies and programs that support and empower adolescents and their families and work to overcome poverty, provide decent jobs, and promote equal opportunity. In all advocacy efforts we must remember to focus on adolescents and families with the greatest need. This is the “option for the poor” in action. (*Putting Children and Families First*)

Catechesis

The ministries of catechesis helps adolescents develop a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and the Christian community; **increase** their knowledge of the core content of the Catholic faith. The ministry of catechesis also helps young people **enrich** and **expand** their understanding of the Scriptures and the sacred Tradition

and their application to life today, and **live** more faithfully as disciples of Jesus Christ in their daily lives, especially through a life of prayer, justice and loving service. Genuine faith is a total response of the whole person—mind, heart, and will. The ministry of catechesis fosters growth in Catholic faith in all three dimensions—trusting (heart), believing (mind), and doing (will).

Community Life

The ministry of community life **builds** an environment of love, support, appreciation for diversity, and judicious acceptance that models Catholic principles; **develops** meaningful relationships; and **nurtures** Catholic faith. The content of our message will be heard only when it is lived in our relationships and community life. To teach compassion, generosity, tolerance, peace, forgiveness, acceptance, and love as gospel values and to identify ourselves as Christians requires us to live these values in our interactions with young people and in our community life.The ministry of Community Life is not only **what** we do (activity), but **who** we are (identity) and **how** we interact (relationships).

Evangelization

The ministry of evangelization shares the good news of the reign of God and invites young people to hear about the Word Made Flesh. Drawing from Jesus' example, evangelization involves the community's pronouncement and living witness that the reign of God has become realized in and through Jesus. The starting point for the ministry of Evangelization "is our recognition of the presence of God already in young people, their experiences, their families, and their culture. ... Evangelization, therefore, enables young people to uncover and name the experience of God already active and present in their lives. This provides openness to the gift of the Good News of Jesus Christ." (*Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization* 7-8) The ministry of Evangelization incorporates several essential elements: **witness, outreach, proclamation, invitation, conversion, and discipleship.**

Justice and Service

The ministry of justice and service **nurtures** in young people a social consciousness and a commitment to a life of justice and service rooted in their faith in Jesus Christ, in the Scriptures, and in Catholic social teaching; **empowers** young people to work for justice by concrete efforts to address the causes of human suffering, to serve those in need, to pursue peace, and to defend the life, dignity, and rights of all people; **infuses** the concepts of justice, peace, and human dignity into all ministry efforts.

Leadership Development

The ministry of leadership development **calls forth, affirms, and empowers** the diverse gifts, talents, and abilities of adults and young people in our faith communities for comprehensive ministry with adolescents. Leadership roles in adolescent ministry are key. Leaders must be trained and encouraged. This approach involves a wide diversity of adult and youth leaders in a variety of

roles. Many 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.

Pastoral Care

The ministry of pastoral care is a compassionate presence in imitation of Jesus' care of people, especially those who are hurting and in need. The ministry of pastoral care involves **promoting** positive adolescent and family development through a variety of positive (preventive) strategies; **caring** for adolescents and families in crisis through support, counseling, and referral to appropriate community agencies; **providing guidance** as young people face life decisions and make moral choices; and **challenging** systems that are obstacles to positive development (*advocacy*). Pastoral care is most fundamentally a relationship—a ministry of compassionate presence. This was Jesus' caring stance toward all people, especially those who were hurting or in need. Pastoral care enables healing and growth to take place within individuals and their relationships. It nurtures growth toward wholeness.

Prayer and Worship

The ministry of prayer and worship **celebrates** and **deepens** young people's relationship with Jesus Christ through the bestowal of grace, communal prayer and liturgical experiences; it **awakens** their awareness of the spirit at work in their lives; it **incorporates** young people more fully into the sacramental life of the church, especially Eucharist; it **nurtures** the personal prayer life of young people; and it **fosters** family rituals and prayer.

Ministry Settings for Comprehensive Youth Ministry

To open up opportunities, we look to all of our resources. Four settings for youth ministry create possibilities and inspire our shared creativity.

Youth

We most commonly associate this first setting with youth ministry: ministry to and with youth. This includes the variety of ways that we gather young people for shared ministry. Youth group meetings, socials, sporting events, youth retreats, youth service events and special youth prayer services are examples of gathered ministries in the youth setting. Sometimes we provide specialized programs for small groups of young people. For example, in one parish, within a few weeks time, several youth experienced the loss of one of their parents due to death or divorce. The youth ministry team responded by inviting these young people to a program designed specifically to help them pray through the grieving process. These young people also experienced the support from peers and adults in the community. Often times we do not gather youth together to minister to them. We provide them with resources. Many parishes develop a card that fits in a young person's wallet or purse. This card includes hot-line support

telephone numbers for their area. Other parishes organize teams of adults and youth to be present at high school football games, concerts, plays and other events where young people are present.

Family

Ministry in the family setting includes the variety of ways that we support families as they share faith together in the home. This includes programs designed to help parents communicate with their adolescent. Resources that help families to pray and share together are also part of this setting. An important process in the family setting is building bridges between youth programs and the home. With strategies as simple as developing information packets for parents when youth attend a program, parents will know what their children are experiencing; they are then better prepared to support these efforts.

Parish

The parish setting includes the many ways that youth experience ministry through the life of the parish itself. How do we include the gifts of youth and respond to their needs through our parish liturgies? What can we do to help youth join the central prayer of our faith? Some communities prepare liturgies that include youth in the liturgical ministries and youth examples in the prayers and homilies. The parish's community life becomes a place to minister to youth when we pay attention to their needs and their gifts. For example, when planning a parish mission or a parish-wide service event, parishes consider its young members. Parishes link youth to the variety of service, ministry and leadership roles in the community.

Wider Community

Ministry to youth in the wider community connects youth and families to programs and resources beyond our parish. Examples are participation in inter-parish, inter-church and diocesan events, and ways that we connect youth and families to programs, resources and events in the civic community. Connecting youth to service in hospitals, soup kitchens and homeless shelters is a wonderful way for youth to develop their gifts. We take advantage of our shared strength when we come together with other people and agencies in the wider community as advocates for youth.

Program Methods for Comprehensive Youth Ministry

Each of these ministry settings can be organized as gathered programs or small group or individual programs or strategies, thereby multiplying your programming options.

Gathered Programs focus on participation in organized, assembled programs for youth, families, parish community, or civic community (e.g., parish events, intergenerational programs, youth meetings, social events, trips, retreats).

Small Group and Individualized include programs that provide maximum flexibility in addressing specific needs of youth and/or families using a variety of approaches that reach beyond the traditional gathered format (e.g. home-based activities and resources, community service, spiritual direction, mentoring, independent learning, small group Bible study).

Putting the Framework Together

Together, the definition, the goals, the themes, the components and settings provide a framework for developing our unique response as a parish community. This framework provides a guide for developing comprehensive ministry and is designed to...

- utilize each of the church's ministries—advocacy, catechesis, community life, evangelization, justice and service, leadership development, pastoral care, prayer and worship—in an integrated approach to achieving the three goals for ministry with adolescents;
- provide developmentally-appropriate programs and activities that promote personal and spiritual growth for young and older adolescents; enrich family life and promote the faith growth of families of adolescents;
- incorporate young people fully into all aspects of church life and engage them in ministry and leadership in the faith community;
- create partnerships among families, schools, churches, and community organizations in a common effort to promote positive youth development. (RTV 20)

Renewing the Vision directs parishes to create “flexible and adaptable program structures to address the changing needs and life situations of today’s young people and their families...” (RTV 25) The following elements describe this approach:

- a diversity of program settings (age specific programs for young and older adolescents, family-centered programs, intergenerational programs, community-wide program)
- a balanced mix of programs (small group programs, home-based programs and activities, one-on-one and mentoring programs and activities, independent and self-directed programs, large group programs, a variety of scheduling options and program settings)

Youth Ministry Grid

One way to visualize the integration of the church's ministries with the four ministry settings is by using a grid (see next page). Incorporating each of the eight ministry components and developing each component using the four different settings is at the core of the comprehensiveness that *Renewing the Vision* is advocating as the most effective approach to ministry with adolescents.

Using the Youth Ministry Grid

Note: Catholic Youth Ministry will provide each parish with a poster size print of the Youth Ministry Grid for those parishes who request it for use with this process.

One of the easiest ways to get a snapshot of your current ministry and identify areas for growth is to complete the Youth Ministry Grid. Use the following process to identify your current programs and potential resources.

Step One – Identifying Current Programs

The first step will be to identify programs and activities that respond to, or are directed at, or involve teenagers. They can focus on young adolescent ministry or older adolescent ministry or both. Complete the Youth Ministry Grid the first time by writing in current programs or activities in the appropriate categories (boxes). (You may want to copy the worksheet onto newsprint and then fill-in the appropriate boxes.) Write “current” at the top of the first Grid worksheet. Be sure to think of small-group and individualized programming, as well as the gathered programming in each of the four ministry settings and for each ministry component. After you have completed your work, assess the strengths of your current youth ministry and identify areas of growth.

Step Two – Identifying Potential Resources

The second step of this exercise is designed to uncover programs and activities of the parish that offer the potential for incorporating a youth component or for collaboration and partnership. This exercise is intended to uncover resources and program opportunities that could be used in a comprehensive youth ministry.

Oftentimes a slight adjustment or the addition of a youth component will make a family or church community program youth-inclusive. In other cases, there are resources in the community (other churches, youth organizations, and schools) that could be used in your programming (e.g., co-sponsoring a program, using a community program for your youth, using video resources or guest speakers).

Complete the Youth Ministry Grid a second time and write “potential” at the top of the second Grid worksheet.

After you have completed your work, determine how you can better use your potential resources to strengthen your current ministry and address areas of growth you identified in Step One.

The Youth Ministry Grid

Developing Comprehensive Youth Ministry

Adolescents	Families	Parish	Wider Community
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	Gathered	Small Group and Individualized	Gathered	Small Group and Individualized	Gathered	Small Group and Individualized	Gathered	Small Group and Individualized
Advocacy								
Catechesis								
Community Life								
Evangelization								
Justice and Service								
Leadership Development								
Pastoral Care								
Prayer and Worship								

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Developing a Comprehensive Mindset

Adopting a comprehensive youth ministry mindset involves a new way of thinking—a vision shift, and a new way of acting or ministering—a programming shift. Developing a comprehensive youth ministry mindset is a process of seeing more broadly. It means seeing the whole community—young people, families, churches, schools, and community organizations—and all of the socializing influences upon young people today. It means seeing all of the resources that you utilize: in your parish—all of the gifts, talents, skills, and resources of parishioners, and in your community—all of the people, programs, resources, and organizations working to promote adolescent growth. It means seeing the countless creative and imaginative opportunities to reach your goals for ministry with adolescents through multiple, coordinated programs and strategies that respond to the needs of young people and incorporate them more fully into the life of the church community. Several of the most important features or emphases of the comprehensive mindset are summarized as follows.

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

The three goals articulated in *Renewing the Vision* give ministry with adolescents a focus, direction, and purpose. A goal-directed ministry refocuses attention away from programs and activities 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 young 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. (See Youth Ministry Grid on previous page.)

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, especially the asset-building framework developed by the Search Institute, 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.

Ministry with adolescents recognizes the need to utilize the power of the intergenerational faith community in sharing faith and promoting healthy growth in adolescents. Meaningful involvement in parish life and the development of intergenerational relationships provide young people with rich resources to learn the story of the Catholic faith experientially and develop a sense of belonging to the church. Ministry with adolescents can incorporate young people into the intergenerational opportunities already available in the parish community, identify and develop leadership opportunities in the parish for young people, and create intergenerational support networks and mentoring relationships. Age-specific programs can be transformed into intergenerational programming and new intergenerational programs, which incorporate young people, can be developed. (RTV 22)

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. The church's concern for the civic community includes advocacy on behalf of young people when public issues that affect their lives need to be addressed. ...This involves networking with leaders in congregations of diverse faith traditions, public schools, youth-serving agencies, and community organizations to nurture a shared commitment to promoting healthy adolescent development and a healthy community, to develop mutual respect and understanding, to share resources, and to plan community-wide efforts and programs. Building these relationships can open doors for sharing resources, and co-sponsoring training, programs, and advocacy efforts. Community-wide efforts are needed to reach underserved and marginalized young people who lack the support and nurture of congregations and community and are often the most vulnerable in our community. (RTV 24)

Comprehensive ministry empowers everyone in the faith community to utilize their 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. The comprehensive ministry approach that is presented in *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* includes a variety of roles.

- **Ministry Coordinator:** the facilitator for the parish ministries
- **Youth Ministry Coordinating Team:** youth and adults who organize the programs and strategies
- **Program Leaders:** adults and youth who lead specific programs and ministry strategies.
- **Support Roles:** adults and youth who provide support for youth ministry through a variety of roles including clerical support, hospitality, transportation, etc.

Renewing the Vision explains the importance of the coordinator's role in facilitating the gifts of the community.

Ministry coordinators have a central role in facilitating the people, programming, and resources of the faith community on behalf of a comprehensive ministry effort with adolescents. Coordination is stewardship – overseeing the resources of the community so that they are used wisely in ministry with adolescents. Ministry coordinators alert the whole community to its responsibility for young people, draw forth the community's gifts and resources, and encourage and empower the community to minister with young people. Of special importance to effective ministry with adolescents is cooperation among the leaders, ministries, and programs in a faith community as they work together in a common effort to achieve the three goals of the Church's ministry. (RTV24-25)

Key Characteristics of Today's Adolescents

The Millennial Generation (1980/83 – present)

(From the Center for Ministry Development)

Who is this emerging generation? What do they believe? Where do they want to go? Sociologists, researchers, the media and youth workers use a variety of names to identify this generation: Mosaics, Millennials, Net Generation (N-Gen), Navigators, the Y Generation.

Using these years, the Net Generation adds up to over 81 million young people, which is approximately 30 percent of our current population. In case you haven't picked up on this yet, this group is larger than the Baby Boomers. This is not **just** a few kids coming along with some new trends. These Millennials are bringing a force into our American culture for which we need to be prepared.

They are growing up in a world that is remarkably different from the one older adults have lived in. They are still pretty young. In fact, they are so young that (assuming they were born in 1980):

- They have no meaningful recollection of the Reagan era and do not know he was ever shot.
- They were 11 when the Soviet Union broke apart and do not remember the Cold War.
- They have never feared a nuclear war.
- They have only known one Germany.
- They are too young to remember the space shuttle blowing up, and Tiananmen Square means nothing to them.
- Their lifetime has always included AIDS.
- Soda bottle caps have not only always been screw-off, but have always been plastic.
- They have no idea what a pull-top can looks like.
- Atari predates them, as do vinyl record albums.
- *Star Wars* looks very fake and the special effects are pathetic.
- They may have heard of an eight-track tape, but they probably have never actually seen or heard one.
- The compact disc (CD) was introduced when they were one year old.
- They have always had an answering machine.
- There have always been VCRs, but they have no idea what beta is.
- They cannot fathom life without a remote control (neither can I).
- They were born the year the Walkman was introduced by Sony.
- The Tonight Show has always been hosted by Jay Leno.
- Popcorn has always been cooked in a microwave.
- They have never seen Larry Bird play basketball, and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar is a football player.
- The Vietnam War is as ancient history to them as World War I, World War II, or even the Civil War.

- They have no idea that Americans were ever held hostage in Iran.
- Most have never seen or used a rotary dial phone.

General Trends

Given that the oldest Millennials are just into college, the research on their generation traits continues to be done. The results of the currently available research are pointing towards several significant trends:

Self-reliance – They believe that becoming successful is up to them, and they are not depending on others for help. Finding a good job is a priority. They are the young navigators. They must chart their own course and captain their own ship: “It’s up to me to create my own well-being.” They value personal experience and are prone to seek out critical thinkers. They are independent and emotionally and intellectually open. They strongly value individual rights: the right to be left alone, the right to privacy, the right to have and express their own views. They want to be treated fairly.

Empowered adventurers – Research shows that this generation has a confidence that comes from a strong sense of their ability to accomplish things that have been entrusted to them. They think and learn in interactive, nonlinear ways. They are willing to explore, search and navigate.

Love of family – In light of all the troubles in the world in which they live, there seems to be a surprising trend toward relying more on their family as a sanctuary against the difficulties of life. They view their parents as the most important source of guidance and emotional support.

Relationships are paramount – They rely strongly on close personal networks of friends and family. They also have a desire to be connected with others: friends in school, interest groups, and online virtual communities. Peers are important and are not always a “pressure.” There seems to be a significant shift in how this generation responds to peer pressure. When asked, “How pressured do you feel to do the following?” these figures show how many indicated “Not at all” for the listed activities: drink alcohol – 77%; smoke – 77%; take illegal drugs – 84%; have sex – 72%. This is far different from some of the images of adolescent life that we see portrayed in the media today.

Global icons – Brand identification in the consumer market seems to be at an all-time high. It’s important to wear the right jeans, wear the right athletic shoes, and drink the right kind of beverage. The generation is returning to the tried and true dream of all marketers – brand loyalty.

Educational achievement – Their main priority in life is to get a good education, and their core value is personal competence. This generation identifies a good education as the gateway to success.

Diversity is important – This generation values diversity unlike any before them. They have a high tolerance for differently held beliefs. They believe strongly in equal rights.

Discrimination against minorities is in the top five issues about which they are very concerned. They know they are growing up in an increasingly multicultural world.

Consumerism – These kids know how to shop. They are not going to be fooled into buying products that don't meet their needs. They are skeptical of slick marketing promotions. They are working in order to be able to purchase. Eighty percent of the teenagers in the U.S. are working 15 or more hours a week.

Mobility equals freedom – This generation promises to be one of the most mobile ever. They don't intend to stay at home. They have aspirations to travel, not only around this country, but also around the world. They already travel on the Internet to many places, and now they want to go there in person.

Mediavores – This generation is addicted to media. It is not uncommon for them to be doing their homework, listening to a CD, watching television, and communicating on-line at the same time. They are giving new definition to "multitasking."

Unabashed fun seekers – After all, this generation is still mostly made up of kids. Kids want to have fun, and this generation is no different. They will not be bored, because there are so many options open to them.

Service-oriented – They have a strong sense of the common good and of collective social and civic responsibility. They are more knowledgeable than any previous generation about social issues. They are very socially concerned about the environment, AIDS, drugs, homelessness, crime, and discrimination. They engage in service activities more than any previous generation.

Hungry for the transcendent – They are spiritually hungry. While more than 80% of young people today will identify themselves as believers, the question that should be raised is what do they believe in? They are hungry not just for answers, but more importantly the knowledge of how to find them for themselves. They are seeking a practical, pragmatic, everyday faith they can grasp that will help them to make sense of the world around them.

Hope – This is a significant change from the previous generation. These kids are growing up with hope. They are not pessimistic or cynical. Rather, they are optimistic and realistic and expect to be happy adults (adapted from *Young Life Magazine*, Spring 1998).

Their Preferred Lifestyle

Teenagers would like to have more structure provided,
BUT without having their independence or their freedom to experiment impeded.

Teenagers want to learn from the experiences and wisdom of their parents,
BUT they're not willing to allow their elders the latitude to impart those lessons in a manner that fits parents' needs and styles.

Teenagers struggle with the effects of stress,
BUT they continue to book busy schedules.

Teenagers appreciate more time in intimate experiences with their families,
BUT they will neither push nor create those opportunities.

Teenagers are frightened by the potential consequences of many risky behaviors,
BUT they flirt with those dangers regularly.

It seems like these kids are open to input and help from their parents, but on their own terms. It will take a creative, sensitive approach to make it happen effectively, but the possibilities look good.

How to Speak to Them?

- They are the future—and they know it.
- Respect their intelligence, knowledge and ability
- It's about how and where you fit into their world, not how and where they fit into yours
- Part of a “push-button” society; in fact, leading it
- Choice over loyalty
- Highly-sensitive “B.S. Meters”
- Talk TO them, not LIKE them
- RELEVANCE! Show how you offer VALUE
- Communicate message quickly and clearly
- Search/need for value will continue, and only intensify as more sources (TV and other) compete for their attention.

Information about the Millennials is taken from a variety of current research sources.

Conclusion

We need room to grow our youth ministries because we seek to guide, form and nurture young disciples. The challenge of discipleship, of following Jesus, is at the heart of the church's mission and therefore of all ministry with youth. **All ministries with youth must be directed toward presenting young people with the Good News of Jesus Christ, and inviting and challenging them to become his disciples.** Fundamentally, we do this by embodying the vision and values of the reign of God as proclaimed by Jesus in everything that we do—in our relationships and community life, in our programs and activities. Growth in discipleship is not about offering any one particular program; it is the **goal** of all our efforts.

Challenging young people to become disciples of Jesus Christ may be the answer to one of the most fundamental problems we have in youth ministry. It seems that an important part of youth's dissatisfaction with the church stems from an absence of a **spiritually challenging** and **world-shaping vision** that meets their hunger for the chance to **participate in a worthy adventure**.

Ultimately, the spiritual needs of youth transcend the legitimate requirements of wholesome companionship, entertaining events, and even worthwhile service projects. What they ask from the church is not so much something to do as something to be. Their lives are already awash with tasks and activities, all designed to help them succeed in life—a life filled with tasks and activities! Meanwhile, the fundamental need they have to commit themselves body and soul to some One who will ask everything from them and give everything in return goes unrecognized by adults who themselves have been asked to give “much” but not all. (Osmer 6-7)

The challenge is simple but not easy: we are called to proclaim the Good News so that it responds to the lives and world of adolescents, invites their response, and empowers them to live as disciples **today**. Our ministry with youth is part of a lifelong journey, a continuing process of conversion. Commitment to and growth of mature faith happens over a long period of time. Through our ministry with youth we seek to help young people grow in a life-transforming relationship to a loving God and in a consistent devotion to serving others.

Works Cited in this Section

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Osmer, Richard. “Challenges to Youth Ministry in the Mainline Churches: Thought Provokers.” *Affirmation* 2.1 (Spring 1989): 1-25.

This section adapted, in part, from **YouthWorks**, p. 1-20
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Youth Ministry seeks to help youth...

- develop a personal relationship with Jesus
- participate in the church
- integrate Catholic values
- apply Catholic faith to daily life
- commit to the Catholic faith for life
- live the moral and theological virtues.
- develop Biblical and doctrinal literacy
- develop personal spirituality and prayer life
- participate in the sacraments
- work for justice and defend human dignity
- serve those in need, and foster social change
- become healers, reconcilers and peacemakers
- develop respect for differences
- overcome prejudices
- develop critical thinking skills
- integrate Catholic sexual values
- develop a positive self-image
- grow in life skills
- discern their vocation
- share gifts

(Summarized from RTV 16-18)