

Groundbreaking

A How-To Guide for Building a Comprehensive Youth Ministry Program

(Part 2): Planning a Youth Ministry

*This resource is provided through the courtesy of the
Archdiocese of Baltimore's Division of Youth and Young Adult Ministry*

*This resource has been revised for use as a general
youth ministry resource in parish settings*

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Ten Steps in Planning Youth Ministry

The *Groundbreaking* approach to developing youth ministry utilizes a team of interested adults and establishes a structure for assessing the needs of young people, designing appropriate programs as responses to their needs, and fosters an ongoing planning and evaluation process.

Step One: Get the Right People Together

The first step is developing a team for the youth ministry program. The team should include people who can be good adult role models, who are comfortable sharing their faith with youth and who like young people. The team should include a member of the parish staff if possible (pastor, director of religious education, pastoral associate, etc.). The team can also include selected young people who have demonstrated initiative, interest, and leadership abilities. The key is to avoid the “lone ranger” trap. Youth ministry is a team effort! It is also important for someone to serve as the team coordinator. A more formal coordinator can be chosen later, if necessary. In the early planning stages, someone has to facilitate the group and provide leadership. Consider the following:

- a) Who should be on the youth ministry team?
- b) Who will facilitate the team meetings?
- c) Who should serve as coordinator?
- d) How do we gain support of the parish staff?

Step Two: Understand Your Goals for Youth Ministry

The overview of youth ministry presented in the Introduction could be distributed and used as the basis for a team discussion. Be sure to begin each planning session with prayer. Pray for young people and their needs. Take time to pray for the willingness of the parish to welcome young people. The team needs to spend time clarifying their vision of youth ministry by considering the following:

- a) What is our vision of youth ministry?
- b) What do we want to accomplish?
- c) What do we want to provide the youth of our parish?
- d) Does our team have a holistic and comprehensive approach to ministry to young people?

This is a time for building team relationships and developing good communication within the group. The team should also discuss whether the program is for junior high, senior high, or both. This decision will affect the style and type of programs to be developed.

Step Three: Past Programs and the Current Situation

It is important for the team to look at the history of the parish’s youth ministry.

- a) What’s been done in the past?
- b) What’s going on right now?
- c) Do we have adolescent catechesis?
- d) Confirmation programs?
- e) Catholic Scouting?
- f) Athletics?

- g) Do we have a Catholic school?
- h) Have there been problems in the past?
- i) What worked and what did not work?

This step is an opportunity for the team to assess the history of youth ministry in the parish and look at the current situation in terms of ministry to youth. Sometimes it may be necessary to break from past failures by changing the name of your current efforts.

Step Four: Conduct a Needs Assessment

The purpose of the needs assessment is to identify what young people would like to see the parish offer and assess the best times and formats for meetings and activities. Your youth ministry efforts must begin with an understanding of the needs and wants of the youth and their families. This can be done through interviews with select youth, phone calls to parish youth, questionnaires or surveys distributed during or after Mass, or through a town meeting (described in *Getting Started: A Town Hall Meeting*). The key with the town meeting is to invite a good cross section of parish youth. This can be achieved through personal invitations by phone, flyer, email, or newsletter (get names and addresses through the parish census). Also use the parish bulletin and pulpit announcements.

- a) What will our team do to assess the needs, interests and concerns of our young people?
- b) Who?
- c) When?
- d) How?

Step Five: Brainstorm Program Activities and Ideas

Based on the needs from the assessment, it is time to generate program ideas. The discussion should use a holistic and comprehensive framework, developing ideas for each of the eight components in youth ministry, described in the Introduction. Prioritize your ideas. Do not try everything at once; do some things very well! Plan for quality activities and do not evaluate solely on the number of participants. Good programs and publicity will attract youth. Go for the short term, immediate successes at first. Then plan for the long term. Do not plan more than your team can actually do.

- a) What ideas do we have for each of the eight components?
- b) What are the top two in each area?
- c) What are our time and personnel limitations?
- d) How can we bolster our team effort?

Step Six: Develop the Ideas into Actual Programs

This step can be accomplished in smaller planning groups of 4-6 adults and youth. Each group could plan one event or activity. Good planning always answers the what, when, where, how, and who questions. (See the sample event planning form in *Getting Started*.) Plan a variety of program formats, times, and content. Plan activities that youth want. Gather youth ministry resources for planning (see Appendix). Plan well and plan for good publicity. Use flyers in the schools (if allowed), a newsletter sent to each parish teenager, personal phone contacts, email, the parish bulletin, the parish website, and posters around

the parish. Be creative and always over- publicize!

- a) Have we answered all the basic planning questions?
- b) Have we planned for good publicity?
- c) Have we considered refreshments?
- d) How do we respond to positive responses?
- e) How do we respond to negative responses?

Step Seven: Develop a Youth Ministry Calendar

It might be easier to plan in seasonal or three-month blocks. Don't forget that the summer is an important time for programming, especially for younger adolescents. In planning, try to achieve a balance of programs among the eight components of comprehensive youth ministry. Check with the parish and local high school calendars, so you are not competing for your teens' time. Also check the diocesan office of youth ministry calendar. There is usually something going on that your young people can attend. It makes for easy planning and early success. You should also touch base with surrounding parishes for activities to which your young people can be invited. It is good for teenagers to see what others are doing and it helps them experience a larger sense of church.

- a) Have we checked the diocesan, parish, and school calendars?
- b) Do we have our activities spread out over the next few months?

Step Eight: Assign Responsibilities and Leaders

It is important to enable young people to take some responsibility for the program activities. Early in the process, however, adults should provide the leadership, if the youth are not ready for the responsibility. Each activity should have a lead agent or co-lead agents with a teen and adult together. This leadership could come from the planning team for that event.

- a) Do we have a planning team for each activity?
- b) Do we have a person assigned to each task?
- c) Have we discussed an appropriate role for youth?
- d) Is the team building confidence in itself by doing positive things for parish youth?
- e) How are young people being included in implementing and leading activities?
- f) How are we praying as a team for each activity?

Step Nine: Develop an Organizational Structure

An organizational structure provides the ongoing leadership and coordination needed for a comprehensive youth ministry program. The structure can vary according to the members and needs of your team. Program committees with youth and adults, a coordinating team, a youth board and adult advisory board are all options for your organization. Use the structure that will work for your team. Also, it is important to determine regular meeting times for the committees, team, or board and to identify the person who will coordinate the organization, set agendas, and facilitate the meetings.

- a) What structure will we use?
- b) How often will our coordinating team meet?
- c) Who will facilitate the team meetings?
- d) Who will take minutes of the meeting?
- e) Who will set the agenda?

- f) How has time for reflection and prayer been incorporated into planning sessions?

Step Ten: Planning and Evaluation Process

As part of your calendar of events, schedule the times when this group will re-assess the situation and plan for the upcoming year. Planning is an ongoing and intentional process and includes opportunities for team building and social times. You might use spring as the time for new needs assessments and program calendaring, and June as time for the annual evaluation. Your planning will begin to incorporate some traditional events (things done every year; e.g. a Christmas social or Lenten Stations of the Cross), spontaneous events (spur of the moment activities; e.g. a trip during a sudden school holiday or a food drive in response to a natural disaster) and a cafeteria approach (variety of activities which allows youth some choice for participation). The team should also begin planning for leadership training for both youth and adult team members.

- a) When will we evaluate our year?
- b) When will we plan for the upcoming year?
- c) What opportunities for youth and adult training are available through the diocese or other means?
- d) Do we need outside consultation from the diocesan youth office in the evaluation process?