

YOUTH MINISTRY TOOLBOX

# How to *start* a vibrant youth ministry from scratch?

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®HOW TO START A VIBRANT YOUTH MINISTRY FROM SCRATCH

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Looking to start a vibrant youth ministry from scratch?

I am so grateful that you have heard the call to reach a young generation for Jesus. In this simple guide that you can print out scribble on, take notes, and organize your thoughts, I hope you will find this journey exciting and rewarding.

Remember, this is a journey. Resist the urge to speed up to get to the finish line sooner. Take your time. Remember the principle of seedtime and harvest!

Embrace the process and your uniqueness!





## Pray TOGETHER

The prayer ministry, (or intercessory ministry) is the backbone of any prayer group. While the setup and framework of a youth ministry may take time, nothing should stop you from praying. The apostle Paul prayed faithfully for Christians in the church at Colossae, even though he had never met them. How much more should we for young people, until we meet them personally?

While the need to pray for one's youth ministry, parish, peers, and all those involved is critical, don't let this overrun your own personal prayer. Make your personal prayer a top priority!

An intercessory team can be set up immediately, to ensure that there is a dedicated group of people; committed to supporting the ministry through prayer and where various needs of leaders and youth can be lifted up. The intercessory team can meet periodically every week or on allocated dates, agreed by everyone.

**List which members will form your intercessory team:**

**Assign a person who will be responsible to make a list of intentions to pray for:**



## Find A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

In youth ministry, the role of the priest is vital for the growth and development of young faith. Sacraments play an integral role in the life of a Christian. Having a priest as spiritual director can ensure that catechesis is fueled through an ongoing sacramental life; making sure that young people are actively participating in the Eucharistic celebration and other sacraments. Youth masses can also be a great way to present the liturgy in a dynamic and lively way.

The priest may not always be present at youth meetings, but he can nevertheless play a crucial role in advocating for the needs of youth to the parish priest. Above all, his role lies in supporting the efforts of all those involved in the administration of the youth group. Often, the priest you are looking for may not be the young, dynamic figure you envision. The most effective priests are authentically driven to care for young people. They make it their personal mission to lead Eucharistic adorations, spend time with youth, attend fellowship nights or even go hiking.

If needed, speak to your parish priest to discuss the possibility of assigning a spiritual director for the youth ministry.

**In the meantime, which elder can you approach to share your vision and begin praying?**







# Build THE TEAM

Beyond getting to know and inviting teens and young adults in, put a good deal of energy into building your team. Youth leaders are the driving force of any youth ministry, regardless of size. They are the ones who will collaborate in the vision of your youth ministry and take it forward.

Who can serve? If you have an image of a perfect core member, get rid of it. Look for authenticity, not skills. Skills can be acquired; character cannot. Sometimes the team may consist even of parents. Whomever you choose, you will want to build up your core team from the get-go. Not just warm bodies, but committed men and women who genuinely care about youth and are selfless enough to make sacrifices; that ensure young people come to know God through the love of Christ and the truth of the sacraments.

Remember, you're not going to be able to do it all by yourself. You will need help! One of the key skills you'll learn in youth ministry, is the ability to delegate. This will teach you humility and dependence on God. It will also foster creativity, diversity and engagement.

Think teamwork. Think love and unity. Train your leaders. Invest in them.

**Who can you think of to serve the youth ministry as Core Team?**

**Make a list of people who have supported you or those who are passionate about youth and get those conversations started.**



## *Cast* A VISION

Every youth ministry needs an identity. As you build your ministry, you will make decisions in pursuit of this as-yet-unrealized identity. This is called vision. A vision is a picture of your shared destiny as a community in Christ. Vision answers the two most important questions for both leaders and followers: “why do we exist?” and “where are we going?”

Ideally, you will cast this vision together: as a leader, how can your team remain focused and accountable in honoring a vision and goals about which they know nothing? There are times when God grants a vision of unusual power and clarity to one person. Nevertheless, even such gifted leaders require the discernment of others. By aligning your vision with the wise counsel of a spiritual director, priest or elder, you create the capacity for an intergenerational ministry. This will also allow your youth ministry to develop a more visible, vibrant presence in the parish life.

Wait upon God. Seek the counsel of trusted elders. Search the Word of God for answers. Fast. Pray. Rest.

**What actions will you take towards it?**

**What actions will you take towards it?**





# Set **SHORT-TERM GOALS**

For vision to work, it must translate into workable programs and goals. Create short-term goals while preparing for a long-term, sustainable future.

Goals are targets that give you something for which to aim. Even if you do not hit dead center, you are at least headed in the right direction. Some leaders, stung by the embarrassment of failing to fully meet group objectives, give up goal setting altogether. Others drift away from setting clear objectives because they lack clarity about what they wish to achieve. This could be because they are operating without a vision for the ministry, or because they are unwilling to take the time to stop, think, pray, and plan.

Think smart goals that are time-bound, measurable, and practical. Fuzzy goals can sound very spiritual, but they may lack practicality and relevance at the ground level. A youth leader may say to the team, “our goal is to become more loving.” How do you measure that? A more concrete goal might be: by the end of the year, plan six fellowship activities that will promote closer relationships in your group.

Goal setting requires team effort, creative ideas, and mutual agreement. Pray before you set them, that the Holy Spirit might bring about that joy and agreement in the hearts of the team.

## **What are your short-term goals?**

## **What are your long-term goals?**





## *Make* THE MESSAGE RELEVANT

Catechesis is your Spirituality (sacraments), but it is also your teaching, worship, Bible study small groups, and so much more. In all of this, we need to continually ask this question: How do I make it relevant to them? This is where understanding the culture of a ministry is important. Do you know these young people? Do you know where they come from? What are their challenges?

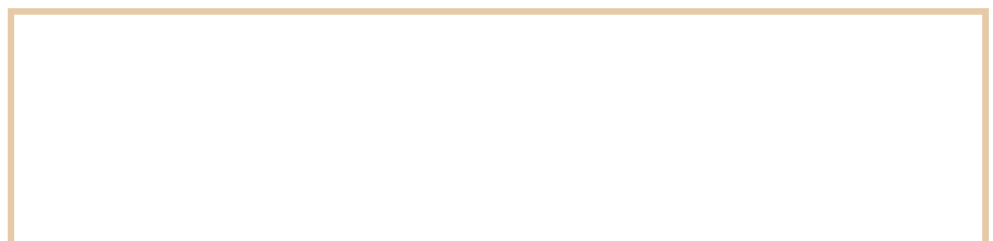
The culture of youth ministry goes beyond the youth room. Based on where they are in their walk with God, you will be able to bring relevant catechesis to engage with them.

We live in an age of information overload. To simply unload the Gospel on young people would only add to the noise of everyday lives. Sometimes we think just because we are leaders, everything we say is relevant and young people must listen. But a large part of relevant catechesis involves listening to your audience and making their needs known. At World Youth Day in Rio, Pope Francis said, "The best instrument to evangelize young people is other young people." A great way to achieve the best of both worlds is to add committed teens to the leadership team.

Culture is important, but it is not all-encompassing. Culture should never compromise the message. But if we are committed to growing the next generation of disciples such that they embrace the Gospel and the teachings of the church, then we need to think more deeply and harness the skills to deliver the message in an effective way.

Remember also that young people today are extremely busy in their academic lives. Keeping an unrealistic schedule of youth meetings will also heighten the risk of them leaving.

**What is the culture of the young people in your church?**





# *Make* DISCIPLESHIP PLANS

Youth Ministry is not “Programs,” it is “People.” Discipleship first starts with relationships. In John 2, we see that when Andrew and James encounter Jesus and ask him where he is staying, He simply answers with: Come and See. Jesus could have given them a to-do list or run down a list of practices on how to run effective ministry. Instead, He simply said, “Why don’t you come and experience it with me?” This is the heart and the hallmark of Ministry.

Discipleship can be fostered via small group meetings (5 or 6 max), Bible study groups or even sports events, movie nights, and nature trips where there is an opportunity to bond with teens and get to know them. When you engage with young people one on one, you become more than a teacher. You become a mentor or a kind of older sibling—a friend. Our young people today need someone they can trust and lean on. Small groups give us opportunities to meet them at the point of their need by asking the right questions and giving group members space to speak up and share their faith and/or their challenges.

In the beginning, the picture we see looks very small. Start with people you already know. Start small but start right. Make it personal. Let your invitations be organic and authentic. Pray for them.

**What small group activities can you think of to get started?**

**Whom can you invite?**



# *Involve* THE PARENTS

Pope St. John Paul II called a family the “domestic Church,” and so it is. The first youth ministers for teens are their mothers and fathers. Parents are the first teachers of the faith to their children. Therefore, Youth leaders must work in union with parents to provide an environment where young people’s social, emotional, and spiritual growth is nurtured.

A strong youth ministry will always focus on building strong, godly families. Too often, youth ministries function as an alternative to families or are in direct opposition to them. Helping parents in their role may be the best thing youth leaders can do to achieve lasting fruit in the ministry.

Having a kick-off meeting with parents to take them through the vision and goals of the ministry will set the foundation of trust right from the beginning. Such outreach will go a long way toward getting the support you need. It will also give you an opportunity to discover any challenges of which you are unaware.

**Make a list of all parents you want to invite.**

**Write down your vision and your goals to clearly communicate.**

**What other questions can you think of to engage with parents?**



## Find A MENTOR

Christ came with a very specific mission to bring about the Kingdom of God. One of the chief ways He achieved this goal was through listening, teaching, encouraging, challenging, and serving alongside the twelve disciples.

We need mentors today, not volunteers. One role is transactional, while the other is transformational. Every ministry leader needs a sounding board to hash out ideas, share worries, and reassess their current state. This is where Mentoring plays a crucial role.

Paul's relationship with the Thessalonians provides a wonderful model for Christian mentoring. Paul modeled a godly life, loved them deeply, and used words of encouragement to comfort and challenge them towards growth (1 Thessalonians 2:7-12). Paul was more than a friend or counselor. Everything he did was to help them live lives worthy of their calling.

Having an elder (whether a leader, priest, or parent) to hold you accountable, while walking alongside you, will not only help you to build integrity and authenticity. It will also equip, enable, and challenge you towards intentional discipleship.

**Whom would you ask to mentor you?**

**How often would you meet them?**

**Make a list of questions to prepare you for that first meeting.**



# Wait

Let's face it: things won't always work the way we hope. There will be people who will let you know, those who will say no to your invitations, and those who won't believe in your plans. Frustrations are an inevitable part of a startup.

It is in these times that we remember the WHY and more importantly the WHO. The Great Commission to win souls is a mandate given by Jesus. He is the founder of mission and the Power behind transformed lives. Our goal is Jesus and our prize is Jesus. If our eyes are fixated on the Pearl of Great Price, then regardless of how difficult the job as youth leader will be, it will be a job that brings joy.

Remember: we were never promised that ministry would be easy. It is hard. Really hard. Be willing to try. Be willing to fail. But be brave to move forward.

Wait. Be open to God.

