

Elements of a Model for Dynamic Youth Ministry

Parishes with dynamic youth ministry support develop models for youth ministry that include these eight elements.

To promote this comprehensive approach, effective parishes develop a model for youth ministry that includes:

- **A pattern for gathering with youth on a regular basis.**

These regular gatherings can be weekly, bi-weekly or monthly. Because youth can count on these gatherings, a community can be nurtured and developed. Parents can also actively encourage participation because it becomes part of the family pattern.

- **Special events and ways to gather with youth**

These events are all the gatherings of youth that aren't part of the regular pattern. This would include day-long service events, Friday night socials, retreats, trips, youth conventions, open-gym night and a variety of ways for youth to get together with caring adults. These offerings round out the youth ministry program and provide ways for youth with different interests to participate.

- **Intentional methods for providing Evangelization and Catechesis for adolescents**

Youth need to experience the proclamation of the Gospel through varied and intentional Evangelization initiatives. Within these efforts, parishes provide adolescent catechesis through both the informal, teachable moments within youth ministry and the intentional faith learning. Through the regular gatherings, the special events, the non-gathered strategies, the family connections and the involvement of youth in parish life, youth grow in faith. There are a variety of ways to attend to catechesis. Some parishes infuse a curriculum for faith growth throughout youth ministry. Some parishes provide faith formation for youth within events and programs with the whole parish community in an intergenerational model. Other parishes provide religious education and sacramental preparation as a distinct element of youth ministry. The important common factor is that effective parishes *plan* for faith formation for adolescents as an intentional part of their model.

- **Opportunities for youth who want to grow deeper in faith**

Some youth are looking for a community to belong to and a chance to socialize with other youth. Other youth in the parish are looking for a way to learn and grow in their faith by going deeper into issues of discipleship and conversion. Sometimes, but not always, these interests can be associated with grade level: freshmen and sophomores can be more interested in community, while juniors and seniors can be more serious about faith growth. Effective parishes provide for both starting points. Youth who are committed to growing in faith want a chance to be with adults and other youth who similarly committed. They can become annoyed and distracted by youth who don't want to be there. This is a serious weakness of the "one-size

fits all” model for youth ministry; youth who feel that youth ministry is just social or that teaching is watered down will go elsewhere. To be effective, a parish should include opportunities for youth who want to go deeper in their faith.

- **Non-gathered ways to connect with youth**

There are a lot of ways to minister with youth without having them come to the parish or to an event. This would include sending things to youth: social media evangelization, e-mail prayers and greetings, birthday cards, study kits, newsletters, prayer cards, emergency phone number cards and other resources. This also includes being present to youth where they are by attending youth events as a youth ministry team such as sporting events or concerts.

- **Ways to connect youth to the life of the parish**

Youth are ministered to as part of parish life. Through the variety of components of the parish’s ministry, youth experience ministry side by side with adults and children. Ministering to youth through parish life includes helping youth to participate in the sacraments of the parish, especially in Sunday liturgy. It also means including youth in faith formation events for the whole parish community. Many parish events become a youth ministry strategy when we are intentional in making sure that youth are included in the prayers, stories, examples and teaching of the event. For example, the parish mission can be part of the youth ministry’s Lenten preparations if we take the time to prepare the mission speaker to speak to youth in the assembly. Community building activities of the parish and parish service projects can also be part of youth ministry.

- **Ways to connect with families**

Youth are growing in their autonomy and needing their parents as much as ever. To minister to youth in the midst of this paradox, we plan for ways to connect with families by communicating with parents, by providing parents of adolescents with helpful programs and resources, by considering the impact of youth ministry on families as we plan and by providing occasional gatherings for families of adolescents.

- **Ways for youth to be involved in ministry, leadership, and service**

Besides being ministered to, youth desire a way to share their gifts; they long for a chance to serve. An effective model for youth ministry will include ways to encourage youth to be involved in liturgical and catechetical ministries, in leadership for youth ministry, by sharing leadership in the parish and by involvement community service. These involvements can be introduced by special projects, but for many youth, these involvements can become regular commitments. This is especially important for juniors and seniors in high school who have a lot to contribute and are sometimes more interested in sharing leadership and attending special events than in being part of an ongoing youth community.

Assessment Tool: Our Parish and the Elements of a Model for Dynamic Youth Ministry

Parishes with dynamic youth ministry support develop models for youth ministry that include these eight elements. Use this assessment tool to identify areas of strength and areas to grow for your community.

For each statement circle one of these options:

This needs growth – This indicates that this statement does not currently describe your parish and that this area needs to grow.

We try to do this – This indicates that you are making efforts to make this statement true about your parish but there is more work to do.

We do this well – This indicates that this statement describes your parish at this time.

1. We have **regular pattern of gathering** with our youth.
This needs growth *We try to do this* *We do this well*
2. We provide a variety of **special events** within which youth can participate.
This needs growth *We try to do this* *We do this well*
3. We provide **intentional methods for Evangelization and Catechesis** for adolescents.
This needs growth *We try to do this* *We do this well*
4. We provide a variety of ways for **youth to grow deeper** in faith.
This needs growth *We try to do this* *We do this well*
5. We deliver ministry through a variety of **non-gathered ways to connect** to youth.
This needs growth *We try to do this* *We do this well*
6. We **connect youth to the parish**.
This needs growth *We try to do this* *We do this well*
7. We **connect with families of youth**.
This needs growth *We try to do this* *We do this well*
8. We **involve youth in leadership, ministry, and service**.
This needs growth *We try to do this* *We do this well*

The “Elements of an Effective Model for Dynamic Youth Ministry” are summarized from *Effective Practices for Dynamic Youth Ministry* by Thomas East with Ann Marie Eckert, Dennis Kurtz, Brian Singer-Towns

This resource is provided by the Center for Ministry Development.
For more information about ministry training and resources,
please contact Tom East at tomeast@cmdnet.org or (253) 853-5422.