

Conversation # 4

Developing Faith Companions – Leader Outline



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These resources are provided as part of the Accompaniment Project from the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry and the Center for Ministry Development.

This leadership gathering is designed to assist ministry teams to plan for ways to empower faith companions for youth. This will include planning for ways to provide faith companions for each youth in your parish, and ways to equip and support parents and faith companions in your community. The follow-through for this conversation will be to organize trainings for parents and faith companions in the parish and develop structures for ongoing support for those who accompany youth.

This process should take about 90 minutes and is intended to be used with planning teams, ministry teams who work with youth and families, other leadership teams in the parish, and groups of interested parish members.

Prepare in Advance

- Set up a prayer space with a cloth, bible, candle and cross.
- Invite someone to lead the prayer.
- Duplicate handouts, one per person.
- Set up a place to gather large group input using easel pad sheets and markers or a white board with erasable markers.

Introduction (10 minutes)

(Slide 1) Introduce yourself, welcome participants and distribute the handouts.

Introduce this conversation:

Imagine the youth in our parish surrounded by caring faith companions who listen and witness. In our conversation today, we will explore ways to empower faith companions for youth. This will include planning for ways to provide faith companions for each youth in our parish, and ways to equip and support parents and faith companions in our community.

(Slide 2) Describe a vision for accompaniment:

(Note: slides 2 through 6 provide an introduction to accompaniment. If your group participated recently in Conversation #1 or if you experienced this introduction with Conversation #5 or 6, you can skip to slide 7.)

A new vision for ministry with youth is emerging. This vision is articulated in the document of the Synod on Youth, and *Christus Vivit*, the recent document of Pope Francis. In this vision, we are being guided to accompany young people as they grow in faith and discipleship. To accompany, we need to listen, empathize, and witness through our care and attention. Pope Francis describes “the art of accompaniment which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other....”

(Slide 3) Continue:

We are called to accompany all young people – to broaden the scope of our ministry with youth to reach those who have often been left out.

“...just as our Lord Jesus Christ walked alongside the disciples of Emmaus, the Church is also urged to accompany all young people, without exception, towards the joy of love.”

Instrumentum Laboris 2018, #1

(Slide 4) Continue:

Youth are making choices about their life. Who will they share their life with? What will they do? How will they find their way? We are accompanying youth as they discover and discern a way to live now but also prepare for the future. All of us are called to live a life of holiness and to seek our place in God’s plan. In *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis places the vocation of holiness at the horizon of all our ministry.

“The word “vocation” can be understood in a broad sense as a calling from God, including the call to life, the call to friendship with him, the call to holiness, and so forth. This is helpful, since **it situates our whole life in relation to the God who loves us.**”

Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 2019, #248

(Slide 5) Continue by sharing this hope:

Our hope for young people in our parish community is that they will experience an encounter with Christ and witness of faith, and that they are accompanied in their journey toward holiness as missionary disciples.

(Slide 6)

We are reminded that accompaniment is indispensable as a way of sharing faith.

"In such places...the **person-to-person contact indispensable for passing on the message can happen**, something whose place cannot be taken by any pastoral resource or strategy.

218- Christ is Alive – Christus Vivit

April 2, 2019

(Slide 7)

In our own lives, we have often experienced that the great things of God are not shouted from the rooftops but whispered heart to heart.

This vision for accompaniment reminds us of the direction of St. Francis de Sales who tells us that "A heart speaks to a heart, lips speak only to ears."

(Slide 8)

You and I share in this mission of accompanying youth with care and prayers. Let us join together in praying this prayer for faith companions.

(Slide 9)

Parishes that are moving toward accompaniment move forward with these three directions:

- **Equipping parents and faith companions**
- **Transforming ministries to promote accompaniment**
- Engaging the parish community in accompanying young members

In this gathering, we will focus on first bullet point: equipping parents and faith companions.

Presentation about Developing Faith Companions (20 minutes)

(Slide 10)

To equip and empower parents and faith companions, we help the community to understand this role, and we identify all of the potential faith companions for youth. We also plan for ways to form and support parents and faith companions for their role.

(Slide 11)

Companion and accompany share the latin elements "com" which means "with" and "pan" which means "bread." John Flaherty describes a companion as "the one who brings to you, or who is bread for you."

Reflection

Provide a brief reflection about Christ as our bread and the companions who lead us to him.

(Slide 12)

A good accompanier is able to listen to youth and share from their experience with humility and balance.

A good accompanier is a person who is balanced, a listener, a person of faith and prayer, who has the measure of his own weaknesses and frailties. Hence, he knows how to be accepting of the young people he accompanies, without moralizing and without false indulgence.

Final Document for the Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment,
#102

(Slide 13)

In *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis elaborates on the qualities of a mentor.

Review some of these qualities listed in the slide.

The Qualities of a Mentor

- being a faithful Christian who engages with the Church and the world;
- someone who constantly seeks holiness;
- someone who is a confidant without judging.
- Similarly, someone who actively listens to the needs of young people and responds in kind;
- someone deeply loving and self-aware;
- someone who recognizes his or her limits and knows the joys and sorrows of the spiritual journey.
- An especially important quality in mentors is the acknowledgement of their own humanity ...

Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 2019, # 246

(Slide 14)

Youth are accompanied by:

- Parents and faith companions
- The family
- A youth community
- The parish

(Slide 15)

We always provide a safe place to walk as we accompany.

(Be sure to consider your diocesan guidelines for safe environment as you develop your strategies.)

For example, if part of the way that we connect with you as faith companions includes connecting through technology by text or message, we could create a way to provide “public/private space.” If you were meeting with a young person, you wouldn’t go into an office with locked, solid door. You would meet in a way where others could see you. Similarly, we can bring a “team” approach to our communications with youth. Choose another member of your team to partner with. Get permission from parents to text, email or message. Include the other adult leader in all of your communications. That way, you have each other’s back.

(Slide 16)

We accompany young people by being a faith companion. These are some of the things we do as faith companions.

Prays

Faith Companions prays for young people in their care.

Connects

Faith Companions connects with young people. This includes initiating contact and finding regular ways to connect for conversation.

Listens

Faith Companions listen to questions, concerns, hopes, wonderings, and experiences.

Empathizes

Faith Companions empathize with young people.

Cares

Faith Companions provide care for young people, providing practical good news for their life situations.

Witnesses

Faith Companions witness to their faith with young people.

Calls

Faith Companions challenge young people to grow and share their gifts; they help young people to hear God’s call.

(Slide 17)

Who were your faith companions?

Take a moment to reflect upon your faith life as a youth or young adult (or as an adult if you came to faith more recently.)

- Who were the family members who supported you in faith?
- Who were the other adults who supported you?
- Who were the peers who supported you?

Ask the participants to reflect on these questions. Refer to page XX in the handouts. Allow a few minutes for individual reflection, then invite participants to share in groups of three. Use an easel pad sheet or white board to collect examples of categories of people who were faith companions.

(Slide 18)

Let's compare our list with these categories:

- Family connections: Parents / Aunts / Uncles / Grandparents /siblings / cousins, and family friends
- Sacramental connections: Godparents / Sponsors
- Ministry connections: pastor, pastoral leaders, ministry leaders, catechists
- Community connections: teachers, counselors, community workers, employers
- Peers

(Slide 19)

Explain the idea of moving away from the kid table concept in our parishes (where youth and adults are separated) and moving toward a 5 to 1 ratio: 5 caring adults for each young person.

Dr. Kara Powell tells the story of moving away from the kid's table in an article here:

<https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/articles/moving-away-from-the-kid-table>

She also tells the story in this video (begin at 3:06 and continue until 5:40 or so)

<https://vimeo.com/185232849>

Transition to talking about the 5 to 1 ration developed by Chap Clark.

From page 13 of the Handouts for Session 1:

“We really need a 5 to 1 ratio. Many children’s and youth ministries wish they had one teacher for every five kids. But researchers Kara Powell and Chap Clark have found that to see students remain in church into adulthood, there should be five adults for each student.

This is a research-based reversed ratio. Ideally, there should be five people praying for one student by name and showing up at their sporting events throughout the year. It’s a paradigm shift. It’s not about finding five small group leaders per student; it’s about finding five adults who show an interest in a teen.

The key is to motivate and equip parents to create that team around their child. Then the youth pastor can focus on the kids who don’t have parents at home who are able to do this. They need to look for teachable moments along with modelling a healthy relationship with Christ.”

(Slide 20)

This slide has animation to allow you to share one element at a time.

What if each young person had five faith companions? Five people who were “echoes of faith”?

Talk through each person.

Some of the young people with whom we minister don’t have parents that are faith companions. Chap Clark says that in these situations we are called to help create the web of support, to create the five people who can walk with youth.

(Slide 21)

These are some examples of ways that parishes are helping to empower parents and faith companions:

Parent / Youth Role Play

- a mom described that she didn’t feel she had faith conversations, it was always more of a debate, and she always lost. She had the chance to role play a faith conversation with a young person and heard some tips from the community to help her feel more confident.

(Slide 22)

Faith Companion Mentor

- an older woman began sharing about the various youth she connects with regularly, youth in her family, children of friends, youth in the ministries that she is a part of. She started sharing the ways that she talks about faith and ways that she helps youth connect with and talk with their parents. The youth minister discovered a treasure here in his own backyard by finding this resource who could be such a powerful mentor for other faith companions.

(Slide 23)

Parent and Faith Companion Networking

- parents shared success stories by describing the ways that they create the opportunity for conversations with their teens. One dad talked about walking the dog with his adolescent daughters. Other parents talked about using car time as connect time. One mom talked about ironing her clothes in preparation for a meeting at work. She always set up the ironing board behind the coach facing the television in the family room. "There is something about the creaking sound of opening the ironing board that gets my teenage son away from his computer and onto the couch. He pretends to watch something with volume low, but really this is his chance to talk. One time, we were so engaged, I nearly scorched my favorite blouse when I re-ironed it for the fifth time."

Assessing Current Efforts (25 minutes)

(Slide 24)

Our assessment of the current reality will help us plan for renewed efforts that match these directions. We will be considering 12 statements described on page 4 of your handouts.

(Slide 25)

These are the statements you will evaluate about young people in our parish.

Youth

- Have an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ sustained through their Catholic faith
- Have faith companions, adults and other youth, to guide their journey of discipleship
- Can identify five caring adults in their life

(Slide 26)

This is the statement for pastors and parish leaders.

(Pastors and parish leaders) Understand the process of accompanying youth in faith

(Slide 27)

This is the statement for ministry programs that include youth.

(Ministry programs) Promote faith sharing relationships with peers and adult faith companions

(Slide 28)

These are the statements about parents and faith companions.

- Understand the process of accompanying youth in faith

- Have skills for listening
- Show empathy for youth and their families
- Witness to their faith
- Share faith with youth and engage in faith conversations
- Pray for young people and their families

Please take some time to provide your assessment of our current ministry efforts. For each statement, you will provide an assessment for your parish community by providing a rating on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being low and 5 being high. If you feel that you don't have enough information to answer, select N/A (no answer.) You can also provide comments at the end.

Allow 12 minutes for individual work.

(Slide 29)

Ask someone to record the feedback discussion. Regather and collect the assessments by recording the number assigned by each participant. After each section, invite participants to share comments, questions and observations. After gathering general comments, consider these questions.

- From this assessment, what do you notice about our parish's efforts to empower and equip parents and faith companions?
- What are our strengths?
- Where do we need the most work?

Planning to Equip and Empower Parents and Faith Companions for Youth (30 minutes)

(Slide 30)

Our work begins by identifying faith companions for youth in the family and the parish community.

Identifying Faith Companions with Families

- Parents
- Aunts and Uncles
- Siblings
- Family Friends
- Grandparents
- Godparents
- Sponsors

Identifying Faith Companions in the Parish Community

- Ministry Leaders
- Catechists
- Coaches
- Adults in ministries with youth
- Faith Mentors within youth programs
- Peers

Sometimes we recruit faith companions and match them with youth within specific programs that include youth.

(Slide 31)

We also plan for ways to support parents and faith companions.

- ▶ Networking
 - Gather parents and faith companions for networking and support.
- ▶ Coaching
 - Provide someone to talk to about companionship youth in faith.
- ▶ Training
 - Training for knowing how to answer tough faith questions and for understanding the adolescent faith journey
 - Training to help youth with pastoral care issues like anxiety, stress, and depression.
- ▶ Resources
 - Resources for knowing how to answer tough faith questions and for understanding the adolescent faith journey
 - Resources to help youth with pastoral care issues like anxiety, stress, and depression.

(Slide 32)

These are some categories for providing training and resources for parents and faith companions.

- Understanding the Role of Faith Companion
- Skills for Empathic Listening
- Skills for Witnessing

- Understanding Youth Faith and Spirituality
- Faith Issues
- Pastoral Care Issues

(Slide 33)

We have two main tasks: creating a community of faith companions and then providing support.

Here are the opportunities for each:

Building a Community of Faith Companions

- Work with families to identify faith companions for youth
- Build faith companion relationships into youth ministry communities and programs
- Identify faith companion relationships in the parish
- Recruit faith companions to match with youth

Providing Support for Parents and Faith Companions

- Provide networking
- Provide coaching and support
- Provide training
- Provide resources

(Slide 34)

Let's continue our planning by thinking about potential resources:

Who are the people and what are the resources in our community that could help us empower parents and faith companions?

- Think about people who could serve as trainers, coaches, or mentors for parents and faith companions.
- Consider resources in the parish such as counselors, parents who could serve as mentors to other parents, and experienced ministry leaders.
- Consider resources in the wider community and those that are available in neighboring churches and through the diocese.

Collect input from participants. Allow 5-7 minutes for discussion. Record ideas on easel pad paper or on the white board. Be sure to invite someone to record this information for future planning.

(Slide 35)

Let's continue our planning by considering these questions.

Collect input for each question – allow 12 to 15 minutes for discussion.

How can we plan for identifying and recruiting faith companions for youth?

How will we match youth with faith companions?

How will we plan for measures to provide a safe environment for accompaniment?

How will we plan for support for faith companions?

- Networking
- Coaching
- Training
- Resources

Conclusion and Prayer (5 minutes)

(Slide 36)

We began this conversation by sharing envisioning youth surrounded by love and care as they grow in faith and discipleship. During our gathering we took the time to consider the ways that our parish can empower and support parents and faith companions. We can continue to plan for faith companions and for the support they need. Thank you for being a part of these efforts.

After thanking the participants, make announcements about next steps in the process, then conclude in prayer.

Loving God, thank you for the gift of young people in our community. We ask a special blessing on all parents of youth, and all who work with youth in our parish. We also pray for each young person. We ask that you guide us to surround each youth with love, care, and support. Help our youth to see your face and answer your call to discipleship. We ask this in Jesus' name.

All: Amen