

# Transforming Ministries to Promote Accompaniment



*These handouts are provided as part of the Accompaniment Project provided by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry and the Center for Ministry Development.*

## Becoming a Parish Who Accompanies Young People

We are reminded that the whole community has a role in sharing faith with young disciples:

...community has an important role in the accompaniment of young people; it should feel collectively responsible for accepting, motivating, encouraging and challenging them. Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 243.

To live into this role, parishes re-examine the way we minister with young people by recognizing that **accompanying youth in faith is the primary way that youth grow in discipleship.**

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.

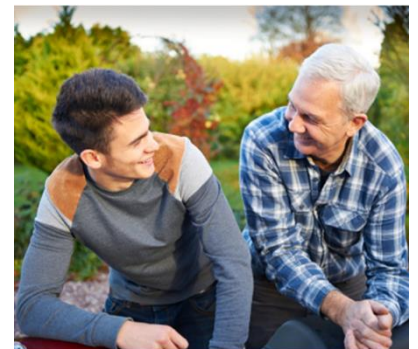
Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 218.



## Transforming Ministries to Support Accompaniment

To provide accompaniment for youth in our parish, we begin by looking at all the strategies, communities, and initiatives with youth in our community through the eyes of accompaniment. For many parishes, ministry with youth has been reduced to an emphasis on classroom based sacramental preparation, faith formation, and event-based youth ministry. With so much focus on programs, relationships become incidental and the actual “doing” of ministry retreats behind a podium. This method of ministry provides formation about the faith in the style of a broadcast of information, but often misses the one-to-one witness and accompaniment described in *Christus Vivit*.

Looking in new ways at our youth communities and programs means transforming our ministries to promote meaningful accompaniment relationships. This requires focusing on helping youth grow in both faith and discipleship. We love our young people and we long for them to experience the embrace of Christ as disciples, so we teach them to notice what God is



doing in their lives. We help them to observe their choices in life and to see the possibilities for their life in Christ. To keep the flame of faith alive, parishes need to minister in a way that is aligned with God's timing and purpose in growing in relationship with young people. Our generous God is always sending opportunities for encounter to His young people.

Accompanying youth asks us to awaken young people to listen for God's calls for encounter and to unite these experiences to sustainable discipleship. To be sustainable in our youth ministries, we must keep the interest of our young people. Even Pope Francis warns us not to "bore young people." Sometimes we allow our fears about how much youth know or don't know to dominate what we share and how we spend our time with young people.



...it happens that young people are helped to have a powerful experience of God, an encounter with Jesus that touched their hearts. But the only follow-up to this is a series of "formation" meetings featuring talks about doctrinal and moral issues, the evils of today's world, the Church, her social doctrine, chastity, marriage, birth control and so on. As a result, many young people get bored, they lose the fire of their encounter with Christ and the joy of following him; many give up and others become downcast or negative. Rather than being too concerned with communicating a great deal of doctrine, let us first try to awaken and consolidate the great experiences that sustain the Christian life.

Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 212.

A second quality of our ministries is flexibility. Ministries transformed by accompaniment place the emphasis on the relationships, the encounters, and the witness of community. Structure is provided to the extent that it facilitates the dynamics of growing in faith together.

The young make us see the need for new styles and new strategies. For example, while adults often worry about having everything properly planned, with regular meetings and fixed times, most young people today have little interest in this kind of pastoral approach. Youth ministry needs to become more flexible: inviting young people to events or occasions that provide an opportunity not only for learning, but also for conversing, celebrating, singing...

Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 204.

# Transforming Ministry Programs to Support Accompaniment

## **Provide encounters with Christ**

Youth encounter God's love, mercy and presence. These encounters often occur in prayer, adoration, mass, reconciliation, retreats, service, nature, music, journaling, and silence.

## **Promote faith sharing relationships with peers and adult faith companions**

Youth are invited to reflect and share faith within programs, during prayer, in small groups, and in relationship with faith companions.

## **Provide for flexible participation**

Ministry leaders acknowledge the complexity of young people's lives and schedules. Youth can participate in gathered activities in a flexible way. There are multiple starting points and doorways into the ministry rather than a focus on one or two groups or programs.

## **Provide accompaniment for youth**

Engagement with youth includes opportunities to foster faith companion relationships with peers and adults. Small groups, led by faith companions, are built into the structure and schedule of programs.

## **Provide pastoral care and outreach for youth and their families**

Pastoral care is provided for youth and families to attend to issues and areas of concern. Outreach is provided to reach youth on the margins and draw them into community and relationships of accompaniment.

## **Include families of youth, especially parents**

Family accompaniment of their adolescent children is promoted within youth ministry programs and strategies. Families are connected to ministry efforts and are included in aspects of the programs. Parents are provided with opportunities to grow in faith and are equipped to accompany their child in faith.

# Transforming Youth Ministry

## Reflection and Assessment:

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.) Provide comments at the end of each section



### Youth

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |     |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| 1. Have an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ sustained through their Catholic faith | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|

### Ministry Programs that Include Youth

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |     |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| 2. Provide encounters with Christ  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| 3. Promote faith sharing relationships with peers and adult faith companions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| 4. Provide for flexible participation  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| 5. Provide accompaniment for youth   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| 6. Provide pastoral care and outreach for youth and their families           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| 7. Include families of youth, especially parents                             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |

### Pastors and Parish Leaders

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |     |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| 8. Understand the process of accompanying youth in faith  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| 9. Provide ministry for youth and their families that promote faith sharing relationships   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| 10. Provide for an intentional way of engaging young people online (e.g. website, social media) that young people find meaningful, helpful, and responsive. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |

### Comments

### Areas of Strength

### Areas to Grow

# Direction for Transforming Ministries with Youth

- Transform youth communities, programs and strategies to promote accompaniment.
- Connect ministry with youth to families and the parish community.
- Focus on helping youth grow in faith and discipleship.
- Provide flexibility in the ways that youth participate and the ways that we deliver ministry
- Provide ministry to youth who are on the peripheries and are often left out of ministry efforts

## *Examples of Ways to Transform Ministries...*

- **One Parish Community** - recruited and trained faith companions so that each youth in the ministry was part of a group with five other youth and two adult accompaniers. These small groups participated in ministries together and met regularly to pray with Lectio Divina and have conversations about life and faith. The accompaniers were also grouped into faith groups and provided with their own accompanier.
- **One Parish Community** - transformed their process for Confirmation preparation so that all youth were divided into groups of five to seven members with two faith mentors to accompany them through the process of preparing to receive the sacrament.
- **One Parish Community** - developed accompaniment relationships and mentors for each youth involved in leadership ministry and service roles in the parish by connecting them with adults in various ministries and providing training and support for the adult accompaniers.
- **One Parish Community** - engaged youth and families in evaluating all the ministries with youth in the parish to determine the strengths, the areas to grow, the gaps, and the ministries that were not working. At the end of the process, they identified ministries that could be strengthened, new ministries to create, and programs to eliminate. They held a party to celebrate the ministries that were being discontinued with sharing of photos and stories and opportunities to honor the leaders. This helped them create space for the new ministries that were needed.



## **Planning for the Transformation of Ministries with Youth - Worksheet**

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**Step 1:** Identify all of the current ministries.

- What are all of the ministries directed to youth or that involve youth?

**Step 2:** Identify programs that we can grow.

- What are existing programs that we can strengthen to promote accompaniment?

**Step 3:** Identify programs and strategies that don't support accompaniment.

- What are some programs or strategies that we could consider eliminating?

**Step 4:** Create new programs and strategies to support accompaniment.

- What are some new efforts we could create to promote accompaniment and discipleship?

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Who else could we involve in evaluating our current ministries and dreaming about new responses?

How could we gather their input and ideas?