

Conversation # 5

Transforming Ministries to Promote Accompaniment – Leader Outline



By Tom East, Director of the Center for Ministry Development

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 support accompaniment by building opportunities for faith companions within all ministries with youth. Together, we will explore these questions: How can we build accompaniment opportunities within all aspects of our ministries with youth? What do we need to enhance, and create to reach out to youth? What program initiatives do we need to let go of to make room for innovations? The follow-through for this conversation will be to engage parish leadership in assessing and evaluating current ministries with youth in the parish to plan for ministry efforts to transform, eliminate and create.

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.

Note: This session includes an assessment of current parish efforts. You will need to guide the conversation so that the discussion does not become negative, accusatory, or defensive. Continue to encourage the group to participate as leaders acting on behalf of the parish and not to represent personal interests. Guide the group to remain open to the Spirit in considering potential changes.

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:

Youth in our parish and community are longing for good news and are making choices about their life and their future. We have an opportunity to surround them with love and support as invite them to grow in faith and discipleship. We are being called to look at our ministry with youth with new eyes and see the possibilities for engaging this generation of young disciples.

In our conversation today we are going to learn more about the Church's vision for accompanying youth. We will also take time to talk about our community and begin planning for ways that our ministries to youth can be transformed to help them grow in faith and discipleship.

(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 of 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.

Tell a personal story of being accompanied as a young person.

Optional: Divide into pairs and invite participants to share about someone who accompanied them when they were a youth or young adult.

(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)

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 looking at the second bullet point: transforming our youth ministry efforts.

Presentation about Transforming Ministries (20 minutes)

(Slide 8)

We've been hearing about the vision and direction for ministry with youth built around accompaniment. What is your hope for our parish youth ministry? What do you hope for youth and their families?

Collect the hopes expressed by the participants. Invite someone to record the hopes on an easel sheet or whiteboard. Ask participants to name their hopes.

After collecting all responses, summarize the comments and provide a transition to the next slide.

We have a variety of hopes for our ministry with the youth in our parish. Together we can look at the current reality and dream about ways to transform our ministries to reach youth and help them grow in faith and discipleship.

(Slide 9)

Provide an assessment of most current parish youth ministry efforts.

Currently, most ministry with youth is built around a youth group, Confirmation preparation, or catechesis.

(Slide 10)

One of the challenges in our current models is that we reach only a small percentage of young people, leaving a lot of youth out.

In most places models do not address racial, ethnic and language diversity.

(Slide 11)

Another challenge is that there are not enough people involved in the ministry. The work of maintaining a youth group or multiple youth programs by a few people is unsustainable.

(Slide 12)

Youth continue to feel isolated. Research demonstrates that even for youth who participate, results are not what we would want. Youth continue to feel isolated unless they have accompanying relationships.

(Slide 13)

Faith formation and sacramental preparation often focus only on the content of the faith and do not attend to encounter, witness, and accompaniment.

(Slide 14)

Parents and families often remain in a passive, disconnected role.

(Slide 15)

The parish and her members are often disconnected from the youth community.

(Slide 16)

We need new strategies. Strategies that are based in relationships and are connected to families and the parish community. Strategies that are built around accompaniment.

“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.”

Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 2019, #204

(Slide 17)

We are being called to provide ministry that is less programmatic, less structured and more flexible.

“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, listening to real stories and experiencing a shared encounter with the living God.”

Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 2019, #204

(Slide 18)

We are being called to build ministry around accompaniment.

(Slide 19)

To transform youth ministry efforts, we can allow ministry efforts to be new and focus on these directions:

- 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

Assessing Current Efforts (25 minutes)

(Slide 20)

Our assessment of the current reality will help us plan for renewed efforts in our ministries with youth that match these directions. We will be considering 10 statements.

(Slide 21)

This is the statement you will evaluate about young people in our parish.

(Youth) Have an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ sustained through their Catholic faith

(Slide 22)

These are the statements about ministry programs.

- Provide encounters with Christ

- Promote faith sharing relationships with peers and adult faith companions
- Provide for flexible participation
- Provide accompaniment for youth
- Provide pastoral care and outreach for youth and their families
- Include families of youth, especially parents

(Slide 23)

These are the statements about pastors and parish leaders.

- Understand the process of accompanying youth in faith
- Provide ministry for youth and their families that promote faith sharing relationships
- Provide for an intentional way of engaging young people online (e.g. website, social media) that young people find meaningful, helpful, and responsive.

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 10 to 12 minutes for individual work.)

(Slide 24)

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 ministry with youth?

What are our strengths?

Where do we need the most work?

Planning for the Transformation of Ministries with Youth (30 minutes)

(Slide 25)

We remember the directions we are building toward in transforming our youth ministry efforts:

- 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

(Slide 26)

These are some examples of ways that parishes are building ministry around accompaniment.

- 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.

(Slide 27)

- 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.

(Slide 28)

- 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.

(Slide 29)

In our parish community, what are the areas to grow, the gaps, and the ministries that are not working?

We will want to involve the community in helping us to evaluate, but let's have an initial discussion to get things started. You can refer to page XX in your handouts for this session.

Allow for several minutes of individual reflection, then regather as a group. Identify someone to take notes for the discussion. Begin your group discussion by naming all of the existing programs and strategies that are directed to youth or that involve youth.

Our first step is to identify all of the current ministries.

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

(Slide 30)

Our second step is to identify programs that we can grow.

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

(Slide 31)

Our third step is a challenging one. There may be programs that have worked in the past that people are attached to. We need to make room for ministries to grow. We can't embrace new things if we continue everything we are already doing.

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

(Slide 32)

Now is the time to be creative and brainstorm. Step 4 is all about creating new efforts that pay particular attention to outreach.

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

(Slide 33)

This was an initial look at our ministries. We will want to involve others in this process. Let's take a few minutes to consider these questions:

- Who else could we involve in evaluating our current ministries and dreaming about new responses?
- How could we gather their input and ideas?

Conclusion and Prayer (5 minutes)

(Slide 34)

We began this conversation by sharing this hope that youth will experience encounter and witness and would be accompanied in their journey toward holiness as missionary disciples. During our gathering we took the time to consider the ministries of our parish directed toward youth. Together, we will plan for ways to transform our ministry efforts to support accompaniment and guide youth to grow in faith and discipleship. 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, you call us to be new in the ways that we walk with youth in faith. Strengthen us as a community. Help us to see the people and resources that help youth to experience encounter, witness, and accompaniment. Guide us to be open to your Spirit as we discern and plan for ways to share your face with youth and their families. We ask this in Jesus' name.

All: Amen