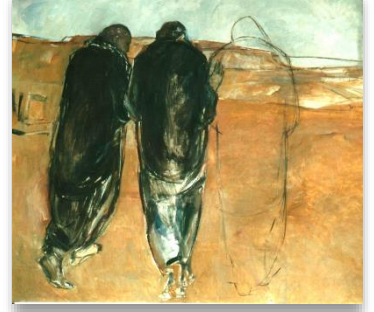


Becoming a Parish Who Accompanies



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.

We are being called to minister with youth in new ways. We are called 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 (cf. *Lk 24:13-35*), the Church is also urged to accompany all young people, without exception, towards the joy of love.”

Instrumentum Laboris 2018, #1



Parishes are being called to radiate Christ’s presence and accompany young members.

... (Young people) will be better integrated into communities that are open, living their faith, eager to radiate Christ, joyful, free, fraternal and committed. These communities can be settings where they feel that it is possible to cultivate precious relationships.

220- Christ is Alive – *Christus Vivit*

The community has an important role in the accompaniment of young people; it should feel collectively responsible for accepting, motivating, encouraging and challenging them.

243- Christ is Alive – *Christus Vivit*

Engage the Parish Community in Accompanying Young Members

Christus Vivit calls us to change the way we look at youth and the way we help them grow in faith. **As a parish we are being called to remember our responsibilities for sharing faith with young people and for raising up young disciples.** In many cultures, the highest celebration of their community’s identity comes in forming and ritualizing the way that children grow into adults. Yet, in most Catholic communities the job of forming youth in faith has been delegated. We delegate this task to a



youth minister or to a small group of adults. We delegate the task to catechists or to a particular youth community. In many ways, we delegate the task of evangelizing and catechizing our young people to publishers and those who develop media content.

In *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis describes a vision for a parish community that is collectively responsible for truly accompanying young people. **This means that the community knows, cares for, prays for, and is in relationship with their young members.** In this vision, the parish is in partnership with families in forming young disciples. Youth ministry leaders work to animate these relationships and engage youth in the life of the parish.

I was once spoke with youth at a parish who were preparing to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. It was an active parish, with a variety of youth ministry offerings. I asked the youth about their experience of the sacramental preparation process. One young man hemmed and hawed. It seemed he did not want to complain. When pressed, he shared that mostly the preparation process was watching videos with a speaker who lives 2000 miles away. He continued to say that the speaker clearly knew about the faith, but then he asked, “isn’t there anyone in our parish who believes this stuff and cares enough about us to share it with us?”

Sharing a living faith with teenagers is hard. Struggling with their tough questions is challenging. Engaging families can be a struggle. But there is real, living faith on the other side of this work. We walk with youth, share faith, lead them to Christ, and join with them in mission. This is the journey of taking responsibility for accompanying our young people. Our parishes are capable of this mission. I also believe that as we struggle to dialogue and articulate faith, parish communities might find themselves renewed in the process.

Accompaniment is about building mutual relationships between youth and members of the parish; relationships with peers, family, faith companions and the whole faith community. These relationships are described in the *Final Document for the Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment*:

Young Catholics are not merely on the receiving end of pastoral activity: they are living members of the one ecclesial body, baptized persons in whom the Spirit of the Lord is alive and active. They help to enrich what the Church is and not only what she does. They are her present and not only her future.

Final Document for the Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment, 54.

Taking young people seriously, means integrating them fully within parish life. We include them in ministries, in leadership, in service, in catechesis, and in our community life. We engage them in our community and strive to become communities who fully witness Christ’s presence.

Parishes Who Accompany Youth

- Look at the engagement of youth in liturgy, community life, and service.
- Look for involvement of youth in ministries, leadership and decision making.
- Look for the engagement of members of the parish community with young people.

Examples of Accompaniment

- **One Parish** - received a small amount of grant money that enabled them to sponsor a series of non-traditional gatherings for parishioners and youth. The first gathering focused on auto maintenance. Youth and people in the parish who knew how to work on cars were invited to join in this workshop and be mentored in car safety and basic maintenance such as checking the tires and changing oil. The parish's next planned gathering will focus on cooking. The idea was to provide connection points for youth and adults in the parish to build relationships in a safe, caring environment.
- **One Parish** - learned more about their community during the process of providing a workshop for parents and faith companions. They had planned to offer the workshop in English but were encouraged to provide a Spanish workshop at the same time. Currently, the parish had a Spanish mass but did not offer Spanish religious education or youth ministry. Because of this, they assumed that not very many participants would show up for the Spanish workshop. To their surprise, over forty parents showed up for the workshop, which caused them to have to change the event to a bigger room. Having such an overwhelming response to the workshop initiated pastoral questions about how to follow-up and create support for the Spanish speaking families in the parish.
- **One Parish** - partnered youth preparing for Confirmation with intentional disciples. There was a woman parishioner who was already providing meals each Monday at the women's shelter. An adult from the youth ministry team accompanied two parish youth who went with the woman on Saturday to shop for the meal (and talk and pray). The small group gathered again on Monday to prepare the meal and then travel together to the shelter to serve it (and talk and pray). After the meal, the two youth and the adult accompanier provided childcare for the moms in the shelter, so the women had a chance to build community with each other. This initiative became a regular part of the Confirmation preparation process. The parish leadership identified parishioners in various ministries who could mentor and accompany youth in discipleship.
- **One Parish** – during a regular Sunday liturgy, recognized and called by name each youth preparing for Confirmation. The parish made time to prepare the community the week before with ideas for conversation starters with young people. Then, during the scheduled liturgy, the parish invited each young person by name to stand so the community could pray for them. The ushers presented each youth standing a loaf of bread to connect the experience with the reading of the Gospel. After mass, the vestibule of the Church was filled with conversations as the parishioners greeted and talked with the youth holding their loafs of bread.
- **One Parish** - connected youth preparing to receive the sacrament of Confirmation to the ministries, service work, and leadership roles within the community. Youth were introduced to the various ministries of the parish during a weekend retreat. In one session, each young person created a resume that identified their interests and experiences. The leadership team then used the young people's resumes to connect them with parish ministry leaders and match them to a ministry position. After celebrating their Confirmation liturgy, the youth processed to the parish hall for a reception. Waiting for the newly confirmed was a line of parish leaders ready to meet and welcome them. Each young person was greeted with a specific invitation such as, "Alex, my name is Jane and I coordinate the lectors, we'd like to invite you to consider becoming a lector for our parish." This new tradition became part of the parish's Confirmation processes each year.
- **One Parish** - communicated the role and importance of the entire parish community in ministry with youth. Every year in October, the pastor would bless the youth ministry team during a Sunday mass. One year the parish decided to do the blessing differently by having the pastor invite the youth minister to come forward at the end of liturgy. The youth minister then asked the members of the youth ministry team, the Confirmation team, and youth catechists to stand. The youth minister then invited parents and families of youth to stand since they are also part of the team. She asked the Confirmation sponsors and Godparents to stand. She continued by inviting

parishioners who were part of ministries in the parish that included youth to stand and the people in the parish who work with youth in the community as teachers, counselors, coaches, healthcare workers, and employers. She concluded by asking members of the parish who would be willing to pray for the youth in their community to stand. With the whole community standing, she asked, “Father, would you please bless our entire youth ministry team?”

Implementing Accompaniment in Your Parish

Parishes who truly accompany youth have a parish-wide vision for accompaniment. Accompanying parishes have structures in place to support accompanying relationships and they have the skills and resources needed to develop practices of accompaniment. The right vision, structure, and practices lead to dynamic faith building relationships and commitments for youth and their families. However, getting this right means change and change is sometimes hard.

Change in our parishes is challenging because people understand the way things are and sometimes even comfortable when the current practice is not working. Change happens when communities realize that embracing something new and letting go is better than the safety of holding on to “the way we have always done it.”

To make a transformation in your community, it will be necessary to gather together and share the vision. Take time to connect with the hopes and vision of the pastor and parish leadership. Build momentum by celebrating small successes and naming the resources in the parish that can work toward building accompaniment.

To accompany young disciples, parishes must have courageous conversations and develop effective skills for accompaniment. These powerful conversations can lead to growing the ways a parish community includes and accompanies young members, equips parents and faith companions, and transforms ministries to promote accompaniment.

Connect the Parish with Young Disciples

- Connect the Parish with Young Disciples
- Introduce Young People
- Connect Parish Members as Prayer Partners
- Engage Youth in Ministries
- Involve Parish Ministries in Youth Ministry
- Invite Parish Members to Help – Create New Roles



Begin with the parish relationship with youth

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.

Pastors and Parish Leaders

- Understand the process of accompanying youth in faith
- Promote a culture of welcome and inclusion
- Provide ministry for youth and their families that promote faith sharing relationships
- Provide ways for young people to identify five caring adults in their life
- Provide for an intentional way of engaging young people online (e.g. website, social media) that young people find meaningful, helpful, and responsive.
- Know youth and their families in the community
- Understand the dynamics of being an adolescent today
- Consider and involve youth when planning for parish life
- Help to provide access for youth to ministry and leadership roles
- Pray for young people and their families

Members of the Parish Community

- Have a shared vision for accompanying youth in faith
- Have an appreciation for young people's experience of God
- Know youth in the community
- Acknowledge and appreciate youth's perspective and contributions
- Have conversations with youth in the parish beyond family members
- Pray for young people and their families

Engaging the Parish in Accompanying Youth

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 |
| 2. Are known in the community | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| 3. Have access to ministry and leadership roles | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| 4. Participate in community decision making | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| 5. Are appreciated for their contributions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| 6. Have conversations with members of the parish community beyond their family and peers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |

Pastors and Parish Leaders

- | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| 7. Understand the process of accompanying youth in faith | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| 8. Promote a culture of welcome and inclusion | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| 9. Know youth and their families in the community | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| 10. Understand the dynamics of being an adolescent today | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| 11. Consider and involve youth when planning for parish life | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| 12. Help to provide access for youth to ministry and leadership roles | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |

13. Pray for young people and their families						
1	2	3	4	5		N/A

Members of the Parish Community

14. Have a shared vision for accompanying youth in faith						
1	2	3	4	5		N/A

15. Have an appreciation for young people’s experience of God						
1	2	3	4	5		N/A

16. Know youth in the community						
1	2	3	4	5		N/A

17. Acknowledge and appreciate youth’s perspective and contributions						
1	2	3	4	5		N/A

18. Have conversations with youth in the parish beyond family members						
1	2	3	4	5		N/A

19. Pray for young people and their families						
1	2	3	4	5		N/A

Comments

Areas of Strength

Areas to Grow

Becoming a Parish Who Accompanies

Reflection and Discussion

- How can we grow in the ways we welcome all young people?
- How can we build the parish relationship with youth?
- How can we grow the ways that youth are engaged in parish life?
- What are some ways we will encourage the parish to accompany young people?
- Who needs to be involved in these conversations?

