

Leadership for Youth Ministry in Parishes Who Accompany



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.

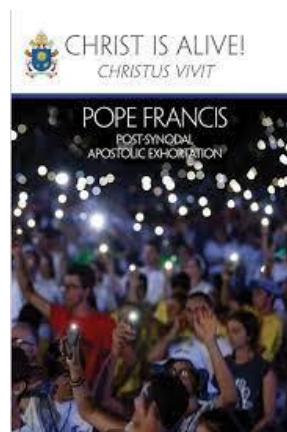
Direction for Leadership in Youth Ministry from *Christus Vivit*

Christus Vivit is a remarkable document. This exhortation written by Pope Francis reflects the wisdom of the Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment. It is addressed to young people and to the entire people of God. It speaks directly to all of us who share in ministry with youth. Below you will find a Top Ten list addressed to adults who work with young people.

1. Leaders reflect Christ.

As people who love young people, our first job is to reflect Jesus Christ.

39. “Even though to many young people, God, religion and the Church seem empty words, they are sensitive to the figure of Jesus when he is presented in an attractive and effective way” Consequently, the Church should not be excessively caught up in herself but instead, and **above all, reflect Jesus Christ**. This means humbly acknowledging that some things concretely need to change, and if that is to happen, she needs to appreciate the vision but also the criticisms of young people. “Christ is alive and he wants you to be alive!”



2. Leaders accompany the young.

The Emmaus story is provided as the example for us in walking with young people. We walk with the young in their questions and together we open ourselves to Christ who leads us.

237. “Jesus walks with two disciples who did not grasp the meaning of all that happened to him, and are leaving Jerusalem and the community behind. Wanting to accompany them, he joins them on the way. He asks them questions and listens patiently to their version of events, and in this way he helps them *recognize* what they were experiencing. Then, with affection and power, he proclaims the word to them, leading them to *interpret* the events they had experienced in the light of the Scriptures. He accepts their invitation to stay with them as evening falls; **he enters into their night**. As they listen to him speak, their hearts burn within them and their minds are opened; they then recognize him in the breaking of the bread. They themselves *choose* to resume their journey at once in the opposite direction, to return to the community and to share the experience of their encounter with the risen Lord”.

218 Then too, 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.

230. In addition to the ordinary, well-planned pastoral ministry that parishes and movements carry out, it is also important to allow room for a “popular” youth ministry, with a different style, schedule, pace and method. Broader and more flexible, it goes out to those places where real young people are active, and fosters the natural leadership qualities and the charisms sown by the Holy Spirit. It tries to avoid imposing obstacles, rules, controls and obligatory structures on these young believers who are natural leaders in their neighborhoods and in other settings. **We need only to accompany and encourage them**, trusting a little more in the genius of the Holy Spirit, who acts as he wills.

3. Leaders are young at heart.

In this letter, Pope Francis demonstrates that God views youthfulness differently. He encourages all of us to be young at heart. To be youthful is to be capable of loving. To grow old is to be stagnant, and attached to things that pass away. We are reminded that Jesus did not tolerate those who dismissed the young.

41 To be credible to young people, there are times when (the Church) needs to regain her humility and simply listen, recognizing that what others have to say can provide some light to help her better understand the Gospel. **A Church always on the defensive, which loses her humility and stops listening to others, which leaves no room for questions, loses her youth and turns into a museum.** How, then, will she be able to respond to the dreams of young people?

13...**true youth means having a heart capable of loving, whereas everything that separates us from others makes the soul grow old.** And so he concludes: “above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:14). 13

35. Let us ask the Lord to free the Church from those who would make her grow old, encase her in the past, hold her back or keep her at a standstill. ... The Church is young when she is herself, when she receives ever anew the strength born of God’s word, the Eucharist, and the daily presence of Christ and the power of his Spirit in our lives. **The Church is young when she shows herself capable of constantly returning to her source.**

4. Leaders take young people seriously, listen to young people and stay close to their concerns.

Walking with youth in faith begins with our stance of truly seeing them, hearing their story, and responding. Young people often experience us as ready to jump in with the answer. Throughout the Synod process, we have been consistently urged to listen to youth.



67 **Each young person’s heart should thus be considered “holy ground”**, a bearer of seeds of divine life, before which we must “take off our shoes” to draw near and enter more deeply into the Mystery.

8. Those of us who are no longer young need to find ways of **keeping close to the voices and concerns of young people**. “Drawing together creates the conditions for the Church to become a place of dialogue and a witness to life-giving fraternity”. We need to make more room for the voices of young people to be heard: “listening makes possible an exchange of gifts in a context of empathy... At the same time, it sets the conditions for a preaching of the Gospel that can touch the heart truly, decisively and fruitfully”.



65 Rather than listening to young people attentively, “all too often, there is a tendency to provide prepackaged answers and ready-made solutions, without allowing their real questions to emerge and facing the challenges they pose”. Yet **once the Church sets aside narrow preconceptions and listens carefully to the young, this empathy enriches her**, for “it allows young people to make their own contribution to the community, helping it to appreciate new sensitivities and to consider new questions”.

103 I encourage communities to **examine, respectfully and seriously, the situation of their young people**, to find the most fitting ways of providing them with pastoral care.

5. Leaders are collaborative to provide ministry that is synodal.

Leadership in parishes who accompany youth is not personality or ego based. We are urged to move together in ministry. This is described in Hispanic ministry as “pastoral con junto.” We move forward in ministry together by valuing the gifts, perspectives, and contributions of the members of the parish community. As a parish we strive to love young people in Christ’s name and accompany them toward holiness.

206. **Youth ministry has to be synodal**; it should involve a “journeying together” that values “the charisms that the Spirit bestows in accordance with the vocation and role of each of the Church’s members, through a process of co-responsibility... Motivated by this spirit, **we can move towards a participatory and co-responsible Church**, one capable of appreciating its own rich variety, gratefully accepting the contributions of the lay faithful, including young people and women, consecrated persons, as well as groups, associations and movements. No one should be excluded or exclude themselves”.[\[111\]](#)

6. Leaders are flexible.

Pope Francis is urging us to make room for the spontaneity and enthusiasm of young people. In the preparatory document, we were warned of creating ministries that “dominate space.” Instead, we create space with room to breathe, where community can grow, and faith can be shared.

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

7. Leaders empower young people for mission.

Growing in faith means growing in our awareness of our mission. Those of us who walk with youth have the privilege of providing ways to encourage and empower youth for service and leadership.

30 This involves growing in a relationship with the Father, in awareness of being part of a family and a people, and in openness to being filled with the Holy Spirit and led to carry out the mission God gives them, their personal vocation. ...Rather, we need projects that can strengthen them, accompany them and **impel them to encounter others, to engage in generous service, in mission.**



8. Leaders awaken young people to encounter.

Our generous God is always sending opportunities for encounter to young people. We are told to awaken youth to these encounters and consolidate these experiences to sustain discipleship. We are also warned – don't bore young people. Sometimes we allow our fear to dominate what we share with the young and how we spend our time.

212...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.

9. Leaders engage the parish to make a home for all young people

The Instrumentum Laboris document from the Synod reminded us of our call as Church to “accompany all young people, without exception, towards the joy of love.” (#1) In Christus Vivit, we are told to be bold and daring in making a home for all young people and to become a community who radiates Christ.

220. ... (Young people) will be better integrated into **(parish) 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.

243. **The community has an important role in the accompaniment of young people**; it should feel collectively responsible for accepting, motivating, encouraging and challenging them. All should regard young people with understanding, appreciation, and affection, and avoid constantly judging them or demanding of them a perfection beyond their years.

235. ... The Gospel also asks us to be daring, and we want to be so, without presumption and without proselytizing, **testifying to the love of the Lord and stretching out our hands to all the young people in the world.**

234. The Synod called for the development of a youth ministry capable of being inclusive, with room for all kinds of young people, to **show that we are a Church with open doors.** ... we need a “popular” youth ministry that can open doors and make room for everyone, with their doubts and frustrations, their problems, and their efforts to find themselves, their past errors, their experiences of sin and all their difficulties.

217. In a word, **to create a “home” is to create “a family”.** It is to learn to feel connected to others by more than merely utilitarian and practical bonds, to be united in such a way as to feel that our life is a bit more human.

218. ...provide young people with places they can make their own, where they can come and go freely, **feel welcome and readily meet other young people**, whether at times of difficulty and frustration, or of joy and celebration. ...

10. Leaders support families who accompany the young.

Families accompany young people in faith. Families are often the first place where young people experience acceptance, encouragement, and unconditional love. To accompany youth, families need support and resources.

262. The Synod insisted that “the **family continues to be the principal point of reference** for young people. Children appreciate the love and care of their parents, they give importance to family bonds, and they hope to succeed in forming a family when it is their time. Who is



Leadership in Parishes Who Accompany Youth

Leadership for ministry in parishes who accompany youth is not about the leaders; it's about the parish. The parish accompanies. The parish supports parents and faith companions for youth. The parish engages and includes youth. The parish provides vibrant ministry for youth, and reaches out to connect with young people on the margins. Leaders animate the relationship between the parish and the communities' young members. They do that through a variety of actions that have one purpose: to support the parish community as they accompany youth on their journey toward holiness as missionary disciples.



Leaders Accompany

Youth ministry leaders accompany youth in the parish community. This could include specific faith companion relationships as well as engagement with youth through the life of the parish and ministry offerings. Leaders also accompany the accompaniers, providing support for parents and faith companions for youth in the parish community.

Leaders Listen and Assess Needs

Youth ministry leaders listen to young people and seek to understand their needs and aspirations. They pay particular attention to reaching out to youth who are underserved and are on the peripheries of the parish.

Leaders Utilize Resources and Research Best Practices

Youth ministry leaders seek to utilize dynamic resources and effective models for the parish's ministry with youth and their families. This includes networking and research in identifying best practices for the accompaniment of youth, the transformation of ministries, and the engagement of youth with the parish community.

Leaders Plan and Implement Ministry Responses

Youth ministry leaders plan and implement initiatives and responses to youth and their families on behalf of the parish. This includes:

- Providing the ongoing training, resourcing, and support for parents and faith companions for young people
- Supporting the engagement of youth with the parish community and the inclusion of youth in parish life, including leadership and ministry roles
- Developing ministry programs and strategies that support accompaniment, serve youth and their families, and engage them in mission

Leaders Collaborate and Form Partnerships

Youth ministry leaders collaborate and form partnerships within the parish on behalf of youth and their families. They also collaborate and form partnerships in the wider community, the diocese, regionally, and nationally to provide the best ministry responses and accompaniment for youth and families.

Leaders Empower Other Leaders

Youth ministry leaders are stewards of the gifts of the parish community. They are constantly seeking out new leaders to involve in the accompaniment of youth and the implementation of ministry programs and strategies that serve youth and their families. They are committed to the ongoing formation and support for leaders in ministry with youth. This includes particular attention to the empowerment and formation of youth as leaders.

Leaders Evaluate and Innovate

Youth ministry leaders provide for continuous evaluation and enhancement of ministry strategies and programs. This includes creating innovative responses to the emerging needs and opportunities for accompanying and serving youth and their families.

Leaders Share a Vision, Inspire, and Support

Youth ministry leaders support the parish and wider community in accompanying and serving youth and their families by sharing a vision for ministry with youth and families, and providing inspiration and support for the members of the parish community as they accompany young disciples.

Parishes Accompany – Leaders Support Accompaniment

It is important to understand the broader mission of the parish and the role of its leaders to carry out the mission. From the time that the Church first established youth ministry, there has been much confusion in our communities on how to successfully implement the ministry. Youth ministry is often delegated to a single person (the youth minister or coordinator of youth ministry) or to a small group of people (the Youth Ministry Team.) In some places, this delegation is much like checking ministry with youth off the parish to do list. However, delegating youth ministry as a separate, stand-alone ministry leaves youth isolated from parish life. If a parish community wishes to truly accompany youth in faith, it must name and claim the responsibility for its ministry with them.



Tasks of Leadership in Parishes Who Accompany Youth

Parishes accompany youth on their journey toward holiness as missionary disciples. Youth are accompanied by their parents, their family, faith companions, a youth community, and the entire parish. To accompany young disciples, parishes expand the ways that the community includes and accompanies young members, equips those who will accompany youth, and transforms all ministries to promote accompaniment. **Leaders in ministry with youth animate these actions by listening, planning, implementing, evaluating, and engaging the community in the accompaniment of youth.**



Engage with Youth

- Plan and prepare for the active engagement of youth in liturgy, community life, formation, and service.
- Involve youth in ministries, leadership and decision making.
- Engage members of the parish community with young people.

Empower Parents and Faith Companions

- Plan to engage all the potential faith companions for young people.
 - Family connections: Parents / Aunts / Uncles / Grandparents /siblings
 - Sacramental connections: Godparents / Sponsors
 - Ministry connections: pastor, pastoral leaders, ministry leaders, catechists
 - Community connections: teachers, counselors, coaches, community workers, employers
- Provide formation, resources and coaching for faith companions to equip them to care for and witness faith with young people.

Provide Ministries to Youth that Promote Accompaniment

- Build accompanying relationships within programs and membership.
- Allow for flexible ways to participate.
- Focus on opportunities for encounter and witness.
- Provide pastoral care for youth and families.

Evaluate and Plan for Accompaniment

- Listen to youth and families, especially those who are on the peripheries
- Assess needs of young people and mobilize the resources of the parish
- Strengthen existing programs to promote accompaniment.
- Eliminate programs and strategies that no longer match the parish vision and mission
- Create new efforts paying particular attention to outreach.

Leadership Role Description for the Coordinator of Youth Ministry

Position Overview: The Coordinator of Youth Ministry facilitates the gifts of the community and supports the leadership team, ministry leaders, and the parish community as they accompany youth on their journey toward holiness as missionary disciples.

The Coordinator provides leadership for ministry that accompanies and engages youth.

- implementing the ongoing training, resourcing, and support for parents and faith companions for young people.
- developing initiatives that support the engagement of youth with the parish community and the inclusion of youth in parish life, including leadership and ministry roles.
- developing ministry programs and strategies that support accompaniment, serve youth and their families, and engage youth in mission

The Coordinator facilitates the development of an accompanying ministry with young and older adolescents

- leading the coordinating team in planning and coordinating programs and services for youth and their families
- facilitating the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a plan for accompaniment of youth and the development of ministry responses that engage youth and their families
- establishing a collaborative relationship with members of the pastoral staff and parish leaders
- developing and supervising the program budget
- assuring that legal and moral responsibilities are provided for within the context of the parish program, including developing and implementing plans for promoting a safe environment

The Coordinator promotes the formation of youth as missionary disciples.

- developing and implementing evangelization and outreach programs, paying particular attention to underserved youth and families on the peripheries of the parish community
- developing and implementing catechetical programs and sacrament preparation
- promoting active youth worship including inclusive and participative liturgy and prayer opportunities
- engaging youth in the mission of the Church, including empowerment for service, leadership, and ministry roles
- providing for the accompaniment of youth that sustains their experiences of encounter and leads to discernment of their vocation

The Coordinator acts as an advocate and link for youth.

- Identifying and interpreting the needs of youth to the parish staff, parish leaders, and the community

- facilitating the development of community among young people, their families, their parish, and the local community
- supporting families in their role of sharing faith and accompanying young disciples
- promoting the pastoral care of youth and their families

The Coordinator recruits, prepares, and supports adult and youth leaders in youth ministry.

- creating a leadership system for inviting, preparing, supporting, and supervising leaders
- promoting the spiritual formation of youth and adult leaders
- developing job descriptions and recruitment processes
- facilitating the training and support of leaders
- providing feedback on leadership performance and continuous support for leaders

Process for the Coordinator Role

- What are some personal qualities we should seek in the Coordinator of Youth Ministry?
- Who should take on the role of Youth Ministry Coordinator for Our Parish?
 - A volunteer
 - A part-time or full-time staff person
 - Assign the position to one of our existing staff
- Who would supervise this position?
- What kind of background, experience and skills would be helpful?
- Where could we look, who could we talk to in searching for this position?
- What support should we provide?

Leadership Role Description for the Youth Ministry Coordinating Team

Role Overview: The Youth Ministry Coordinating team works on behalf of the parish community to support youth on their journey toward holiness as missionary disciples.

The Youth Ministry Coordinating Team shares leadership in overseeing the parish's ministry to accompany youth.

- Providing vision, goals, and directions for all aspects of youth ministry, including
 - implementing ongoing training, resourcing, and support for parents and faith companions for young people.
 - developing initiatives that support the engagement of youth with the parish community and the inclusion of youth in parish life, including leadership and ministry roles.
 - developing ministry programs and strategies that support accompaniment, serve youth and their families, and engage youth in mission
- Coordinating schedules and programs for youth ministry
- Planning for communication and engagement with youth and families.
- Making recommendations for resources, budget, and facility usage regarding youth ministry
- Assuring adequate recruitment, training, and support for leadership in youth ministry
- Establishing and updating any policies and/or procedures necessary for effective implementation of youth ministry
- Providing regular feedback to the parish staff, parish council, and leadership groups regarding needs, recommendations, and accomplishments of youth ministry
- Advocating for the needs of youth and families within the parish and wider community

The Youth Ministry Coordinating Team facilitates the development of an accompanying ministry with young and older adolescents

- listening to youth and families and assessing needs of youth, paying particular attention to underserved youth and those on the peripheries of the parish.
- planning, implementing and evaluating plans for the accompaniment of youth and the development of ministry responses that engage youth and their families.

The Youth Ministry Coordinating Team promotes the formation of youth as missionary disciples.

- providing for the accompaniment of youth that sustains their experiences of encounter and leads to discernment of their vocation
- developing and implementing evangelization and outreach programs, paying particular attention to underserved youth and families on the peripheries of the parish community
- promoting the pastoral care of youth and their families
- developing and implementing catechetical programs and sacrament preparation
- promoting active youth worship including inclusive and participative liturgy and prayer opportunities
- engaging youth in the mission of the Church, including empowerment for service, leadership, and ministry roles

Process for the Youth Ministry Coordinating Team

- What are some personal qualities we should seek in members of Youth Ministry Coordinating Team?
- What kind of background, experience and skills would be helpful?
- Where could we look, who could we talk to in searching for members of this team?
- What support should we provide?

Resources

Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit – Post Synodal Exhortation to Youth People*

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html

USCCB Synod/Christus Vivit website, with U.S. documents, resources, and more:

www.usccb.org/christusvivit

NFCYM Christus Vivit website, with current and future resources and links pertaining to Christus Vivit:

<https://nfcym.org/resources/topics/christus-vivit-resources/>