



THE ACCOMPANIMENT PROJECT

Thank you for your interest in the *Accompaniment Project* from the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM). This grant-funded initiative seeks to guide parishes through reimagining how to accompany young people in encountering Christ and growing in discipleship. The *Accompaniment Project* is not a program, but it is an experimental approach to youth ministry that helps parishes meet the needs of the young people in their communities. NFCYM will select forty diverse parishes across at least five dioceses in the United States to participate in the 3-year project.

INFORMATION FOR PASTORS

WHAT IS THE ACCOMPANIMENT PROJECT?

The *Accompaniment Project* is not a youth ministry program. It is a strategic planning process that guides your parish through reimagining how to accompany all young people encountering Christ and growing in discipleship. To help you, an *Accompaniment Project* coach, a veteran professional minister assigned by NFCYM, will accompany and coach your parish leaders at no cost to your parish.

Our current methods and strategies for making youth disciples are failing us, as evidenced by how many youth and young adults are no longer practicing the faith. If you would like the opportunity to reimagine your parish's efforts to evangelize and catechize youth, we encourage you to apply for this intentional and systematic project grounded in accompaniment. Your parish community is incomplete without your young people, and every member of your community can play a role in accompanying young people.

The project seeks to help parishes identify ways to empower as many adults in the parish as possible to be faith companions – adults who are willing to accompany young people in the parish, especially those on the margins. This is not a project for just the youth ministry team or the faith formation team; rather, the project necessitates the participation of the entire parish. The parish is committing to a 3-year process – 6 months of onboarding, training, and planning (beginning in March 2024), 2 years of implementing the strategic plan (from September 2024-August 2026), and 6 months of evaluation (from September 2026-January 2027).

CULTURAL CONTEXT

Since the *Accompaniment Project* is not a program, but rather a way to empower the adults in the parish to become Faith Companions for the youth, the project is well suited for adaptability in different cultural contexts. One goal of the project is to have parish leaders implement these resources in as many different cultural contexts as possible. This will allow us to learn what adaptations need to be made before sharing the resources with the wider Church. As such, all resources will be offered in both English and Spanish as needed, with the possibility of adapting them in other languages if the right partners can be identified. The NFCYM welcomes parishes with all kinds of ethnic and cultural diversity to apply for the project.

BENEFITS

In short, your parish would receive three things to assist you in forming exponentially more high school youth as disciples of Christ: training, resources, and support.

Training: The selected parishes will begin the project with training for parish leaders on a variety of topics related to the project. These will include: the current generation of young people, social trends, the religious yearnings of youth, and the challenges and fruits of existing youth ministry models. The parish leaders will also be guided through a community needs assessment process to identify what the young people in their community might need. The NFCYM appointed coach will provide all of this training **at no cost to the parish**.

Parishes that are selected to be a part of the *Accompaniment Project* will be required to recruit members for your Accompaniment Steering Committee, including a chairperson for the committee and a staff liaison for the committee (in some cases, this could be the same person). The purpose of these roles is to guide the parish through this 3-year long process. The coach will train the parish leaders in how to recruit the Steering Committee.

The NFCYM appointed coach will also provide ongoing training based on needs surfaced as the project unfolds.

Resources: All the resources (PowerPoints, handouts, leader guides, videos, etc.) needed to implement the *Accompaniment Project* will be provided to participating parishes; however, the Accompaniment Steering Committee or their designees will lead the trainings and events at the parish level. These resources will be available on the NFCYM online platform. This platform will also act as a space to network with other parishes in the project to share learnings from using the resources. Some of the sessions provided center on the following topics:

- Introduction to Accompaniment
- Transforming Ministries to Promote Accompaniment
- Becoming a Parish Who Accompanies
- Being a Faith Companion
- Witnessing Faith
- Developing Faith Companions
- Leadership for Accompaniment

Support: The parishes who participate in the *Accompaniment Project* will not go through this process alone! Parishes will gather into cohorts of eight parishes. Each cohort will have a designated NFCYM appointed coach to guide you through the whole 3-year process, from beginning to end. The coach will gather the cohort regularly for continued formation and sharing of learnings from the project. The coach will also assist the parishes in developing and continually evaluating their own strategic plans. The NFCYM online platform will also offer the added benefit of being able to share information and communicate with other participants.

As an extension of support for the parishes, NFCYM will also invite participating parishes to apply for matching grants up to \$10,000 to assist them in the implementation of their strategic plans for the project.

EXPECTATIONS

To apply for the *Accompaniment Project*, the pastor should be willing to commit his parish to doing the following:

- Identify a parish staff person to serve as project liaison.
- Create an Accompaniment Steering Committee.
- Participate in the training and consultation.
- Identify faith companions within the parish.
- Implement the Accompaniment Model with youth and their families.
- Support faith companions and share Accompaniment Project resources with them.
- Arrange for a parish-wide event that focuses on accompanying youth.
- Evaluate the accompaniment process and project.
- Agree to continue with the project over the 3-year timeline.

PASTOR SUPPORT

In piloting the *Accompaniment Project* in nine parishes in 2019, one of the key learning take-aways was the importance of the pastor's support to the success of the project. While the pastor is not expected to be a part of every training, pastor support of the project would include the following:

- Attending the initial gathering of the diocesan cohort to kick off the project.
- Ensuring the Accompaniment Steering Committee has the right people to sustain the project for three years and beyond.
- Publicly supporting the project from the pulpit, and encouraging parishioners to engage in the sessions.
- Encouraging the parish staff and ministry leaders to reimagine how they view young people and what aspirations they have for ministry with youth.
- Helping staff and ministry leaders be open to change and to the movement of the Holy Spirit.
- Intentionally planning for any leadership transitions that might occur in the next three years – in clergy, staff, or the Steering Committee. If the project relies solely on the efforts of one person, the parish will not be set up for long-term success.