

“Peter, do you love me...?”

—John 21:15

FEED MY SHEEP



YOUTH MINISTRY HANDBOOK

First Edition

Fall 2018

**“We love because
he first loved us.”**

—1st John 4

Introduction

The purpose of this handbook is to introduce adults to the most essential principles for evangelizing young people.

There are certain mentalities into which youth ministry has been relegated to simply “youth group.” The distillation of our work could be expressed by the terms Christian mentorship or accompaniment.

This is not an exhaustive handbook, nor does it intend to suggest particular programs. Those who are working for the Kingdom of God with youth must be like craftsmen who know how to use each tool, and work with a sense of vision and direction. Please take this handbook into a dedicated time with the Blessed Sacrament. Allow the master of all hearts to speak to you through these words and ideas.

Someone once told me

the story of a man who lived in China under the persecution. He risked his life and the life of his family to harbor a priest. After gaining asylum in the United States, he began attending a local parish. The local priest saw him often, and learned his story. Over time the priest saw the Chinese man less and less, and eventually not at all. The man had opened a successful Chinese restaurant and he no longer had time for faith. What persecution couldn't take from him in Communist China, materialism did in free America.

In modern America, we are competing against “*the spirit of the world*” in an unprecedented way. How do we form what we do as youth ministers to combat this?

“Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. Just as no branch can bear fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. I am the vine and you are the branches. The one who remains in Me, and I in him, will bear much fruit. For apart from Me you can do nothing.”

—John 15



1 Jesus Christ is the Lord

If you participate in the life of the Church, you are giving assent to the historical conviction that Jesus Christ is the Lord. We follow the line of people throughout 2,000 years of the Church's history who believe that the man, Jesus, was in fact, God the Son incarnate in human flesh.



“Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”

—Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

Everything that follows flows out of that conviction. Programs, ministries and organizations are only as effective as their ability to remain rooted in that reality.

2 Love that flows from heaven

A COMMUNITY THAT EVANGELIZES ITS YOUNG PEOPLE

Youth ministry and faith formation programs have, at their heart, a group of adults who are converted and convicted about Jesus Christ and His Church. Without foundational, evangelized, formed people, difficulties and confusion arise. Many communities struggle with this, and it manifests itself in difficulty finding volunteers, and conflicting experiences with the requirements set forth for sacramental preparation. Those called to ministry in the Church should live from the following progression:

» LOVE OF GOD

*Pastors, parents
and youth ministers are
loved by God and love God.*

» LOVE OF FRATERNITY

*Shared life in Christ creates
a strong community of
prayer and Love.*

» LOVE OF THE YOUTH

*Love of the community
overflows into their
apostolate efforts.*

PARENTS, CORE MEMBERS AND LEADERSHIP TEAMS

Successful youth ministry cannot be done alone. When we empower others to be on mission for the Kingdom of God, we increase our effectiveness. Jesus calls us not only to make disciples, but to commission disciple makers. Parents are the primary formators and educators of their children. They play or neglect an irreplaceable role. The younger the child, the more important it is that the faith be formed by the habits and example of the parents. Core members are those adults who share in the work of the youth ministers. They are the adults who multiply the work of evangelization. The primary concern is creating spaces for encounter with Jesus Christ. Core members can also be great help in the practical aspects of ministry. Empowering students to witness to other students is another part of the evangelization road map. Creating a high school leadership team that is nurtured with great attention can yield incredible results.

SUPPORT NETWORK AND CHEERLEADERS

A much overlooked addition to your ministry is an intentional advisory and support committee. You cannot do great work alone, and it will be to everyone's advantage to have an intentional team of adults who support the work of youth ministry.

The work of evangelization

In order to effectively minister to youth, we must shed the idea that adults are simply chaperones who ‘stand in the back.’ Mentorship doesn’t happen by accident, and trust isn’t built from afar. Adults who wish to lead youth to Christ must be present to them as Christ is present to us. Incarnational evangelization is done through accompaniment. We walk with those we are investing in. All events, retreats, camps, meetings, trips and gatherings need a spirit of example and accompaniment. Sometimes, it feels like there is a struggle between youth ministry that focuses only on social gatherings, or youth ministry that focuses only on catechesis, but fails to inspire a sense of belonging and ownership. The concept of *win*, *build* and *send* can help address these issues. This process of evangelization is the model successfully used by FOCUS (*Fellowship of Catholic University Students*).

WIN

Through friendship and accompaniment, we build trust and relationship with others. When we spend time with people playing sports, hiking, sharing coffee, going on pilgrimage together, and listening to their story, we are winning people’s hearts. Authentic friendship is a space where someone can be themselves and where they feel open about their life. This provides a space where the love of God can flow forth and the proclamation of the Gospel can be effectively shared. Good

youth ministry will balance activities that facilitate openness without pressure, with opportunities for meaningful conversation. Not every exchange should be serious, but each should have a higher purpose in mind. Some ministries struggle to balance fun and seriousness. Fun activities are where relationship is built for the sake of discipleship and life-changing moments.

BUILD

From a place of authentic friendship, we lead others into an encounter with Jesus Christ. The encounter is the primary building block for all of formation. We form disciples who know, love and serve our Lord and His Church. This step forms the identity of who the person is, and how they live their life. Formation happens in spaces where people can be challenged to take steps to root out sin from their lives, and grow in the trust and understanding of God’s plan.

SEND

The sons and daughters of the Lord enter into His Vineyard for the salvation of souls. They are sent out, with support and direction to continue the work of evangelization. The lived relationship with God forms a person’s identity. When a person lives in the joyful presence of God, and knows who they are, they will live out the mission of being a disciple of Christ.

4 Renewal of the mind



“For the most part, the same influences that form other people’s minds, form ours—the same habits of thought, inclinations, bodily senses, indolences, worked upon by the same newspapers, periodicals, bestsellers, films, radio programmes. So that we have not so much Catholic minds as worldly minds with Catholic patches. Intellectually, we wear our Catholicism like a badge on the lapel of the same kind of suit that everyone else is wearing.”

—Frank Sheed: Theology and Sanity

Conversion

Many difficulties come from a fundamental lack of conversion of the mind. Many people live as cultural Catholics, yet they do not think with a Kingdom mindset. The main work of Evangelization is the work of conversion. The conversion of both mind and heart is necessary to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. After the initial proclamation and acceptance of the Gospel, our lives must become focused on ongoing and ever deepening conversion. Saint Paul says, “... you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ! ...to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self ...” [Ephesians 4].

Relational ministry

The Lord calls each of us to be saints. To be holy. When Jesus forgave sins, He also often performed a healing. There is a link between physical wholeness and holiness. As we become more deeply the people that God is calling us to be, our faculties and passions become more integrated with our intellect and our souls. Jesus is the great healer. As His body, we are called to participate in this same work. The most fundamental reality of life is the relationship of the Trinity. Jesus invites us to relationship, and it is through relationship that we extend that same invitation to others. Relational ministry is a shift away from relying on programs and media to do the work of ministry. It is the admittance that friendship and dialogue are the first steps to proclaiming the Gospel.



“To bring people closer to God, competency and clarity are important, but they are not enough. Of themselves they do not touch hearts deeply. Personal sanctity and goodness do. It is the saints who light fires. There is a direct correlation between the beauty of holiness and the fruitfulness of our work and interpersonal relationships.”

—Fr Thomas Dubay

The 5 needs of adolescents

A program developed by the Augustine Institute, *yDisciple*, is based around understanding the driving needs of adolescents. When we think about youth ministry that meets youth where they are, we should consider and implement programs that address these needs.

1. THE NEED TO BE UNDERSTOOD

The need to be understood is a great psychological need for us as human beings. Unfortunately, the majority of teenagers do not believe that adults understand them or even care about them. However, when an adult takes a genuine interest in a teenager and seeks first to understand, that adult earns the right to be heard. If adults want to hand on the Faith to teenagers, they must seek first to understand what is going on in their lives and hearts. They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

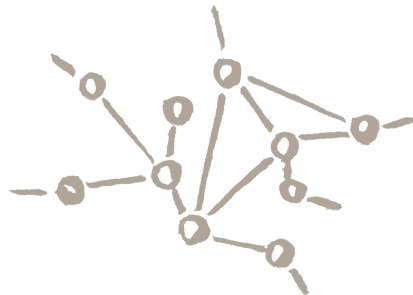
2. THE NEED TO BELONG

Teenagers are motivated to meet the "need to belong" before higher growth needs like understanding and living the Catholic Faith. In fact, it is often the case that teenagers will compromise the morals in which they have been raised in order to belong somewhere. If adults don't help teenagers build healthy, life-giving relationships with one another, they will meet that need themselves. On the other hand, if adults

create an environment where teens are known, loved and cared for, they will have created an ideal environment for passing on the Faith.

3. THE NEED TO BE TRANSPARENT

Related to the need to be understood is the need to be transparent. Sadly, teenagers rarely have the freedom to be transparent today, especially with one another. It is too dangerous to be vulnerable in a peer-dominated world focused on image and popularity. They long for the opportunity to be transparent about their doubts, concerns, fears, insecurities, hopes, and dreams, along with the confidence of knowing they will not be judged, but loved and supported. In fact, this is necessary in order for them to grow in self-awareness and self-esteem. A small group where confidentiality and transparency are established can be an ideal environment to meet this need and, as St. John Paul II said, "allow for true human relationships." (*The Church in America*)



6 The 5 needs of adolescents



4. THE NEED TO ENGAGE IN CRITICAL THINKING ABOUT FAITH AND LIFE

There is a great deal of brain development in adolescents. They are transitioning from concrete thinking to abstract thinking and are able to conceptualize ideas such as love, justice, fairness, and truth. Teens are able to ponder the big questions in life like: Is there a God? Can I know God? Do I need religion? Can I know God's plan for my life? In addition, they are in the process of becoming their own person. They want to be treated as adults and no longer want to be told what to do or what to believe. They are critically evaluating what they have been raised to believe and they are no longer interested in answers to questions they are not asking. Interesting topics, thought provoking questions, lively discussion, dialogue, and freedom of expression engage teenagers in critical thinking.

5. THE NEED FOR GUIDANCE

Teenagers need dialogue, collaboration, and friendship with adults in order to become adults themselves. Relationships with adults

help them answer the deep fundamental questions like: Am I lovable? Am I capable? What difference does my life make? Teenagers need be challenged to greatness through the direction, encouragement and support of caring adults. It is a well-known educational principle that young people raise to the level of our expectations of them. Teenagers will give their lives to Jesus with the help of loving, faith-filled adults investing in them.

THE YDISCIPLE® MODEL

YDisciple believes there is only one way to adequately meet all five driving needs of teenagers—through small group discipleship.

Small group (5–8 teens, same gender, close in age, and ideally already friends): Meets the need to be understood; to belong; and the need for transparency.

Discipleship: A caring adult leader or two, in communication and collaboration with parents, facilitates the presentation and discussion of faith and life topics in order to meet the needs of critical thinking and guidance. They establish confidentiality, faith sharing, accountability, and provide guidance to the teens in growing in their relationship with Jesus. YDisciple aims to mobilize parents and adult mentors to meet the needs of teenagers and help them take ownership of their faith and launch them as lifelong disciples.

“... the first step is personal dialogue, when the other person speaks and shares his or her joys, hopes and concerns for loved ones, or so many other heartfelt needs. Only afterwards is it possible to bring up God’s word, perhaps by reading a Bible verse or relating a story, but always keeping in mind the fundamental message: the personal love of God who became man, who gave himself up for us, who is living and who offers us his salvation and his friendship.”

—Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*

7 Venues of your ministry

Understanding the needs of adolescents can help to strategize about the most effective model of ministry. If you are a volunteer youth minister, it would be best to think about which venues (maybe not all) will be most effective given their purpose.

CONTACT WORK: THE INVESTMENT OF TIME TO BUILD TRUST

Youth need to know that adults care about their lives. A youth minister cannot effectively reach youth if he or she is in an office from 9–5, Monday–Friday. Office hours have their place, but building rapport with youth is essential, regardless of schedules. Teaching your Core and Leadership teams the value of availability and flexibility builds a culture where youth feel their lives are important. You can tell someone that you are going to show up, but you cannot fake actually showing up. Youth are especially sensitive to this reality.

LARGE GROUP GATHERINGS

Large group gatherings are a great way to bring many young people together. They can be a good way to invite new youth to be a part of youth ministry. These gatherings may be more lively than other venues, but the proclamation of the Kerygma should be the final word of the evening.

SMALL GROUP MEETINGS

Large group ministry alone may struggle to connect youth in a more meaningful way with one another. As outlined in the 5 needs of adolescents, there is a great need to consistently live out life with a smaller group of friends in the Lord. Accountability, prayer and deeper discussion are more possible in a small group setting. Small groups can also build a long-term, sustainable model for living out the Catholic faith through college, work, and the rest of adulthood.

CAMP AND/OR RETREAT EXPERIENCES

Camp, conference, and retreat experiences have the possibility of being extremely powerful. Time away without the distraction of technology and social media can provide the context for encounter with Jesus Christ. The Christian faith has a rich history of pilgrimage, retreats and time away spent seeking the face of the Lord.



THE SACRAMENTS

The greatest resources in the work of Evangelization are the sacraments—gifts of infinite value, given to the Church. In particular, the Eucharist and Reconciliation lead us into an ever greater intimacy with the Trinity. The Eucharist is truly the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. It cannot be overstated how powerful it is to put young people in front of the Eucharist. Prayerful music combined with periods of silence, can aid the work of softening hearts. Candles, lights, and incense can also help to orient the senses toward Jesus in adoration.

SILENCE

Modern man struggles to observe intentional periods of silence. This is especially true for youth. But silence is a necessary place for asking the fundamental questions about life, and to hear God.

“If I were allowed to prescribe just one remedy for all the ills of the modern world, I would prescribe silence. For even if the Word of God were proclaimed in the modern world, how could one hear it with so much noise?”

—Søren Kierkegaard

OTHER MATERIALS

A youth minister should know the youth in their care well enough to assemble effective materials for an initial or deepening conversion. The human heart is drawn by truth, goodness and beauty. There are many different kinds of resources available. It must be emphasized that a flourishing ministry is not a ‘plug and play’ DVD program. If non-Catholic resources are to be used, they should be screened attentively and integrated in a meaningful way that avoids confusion. Resources such as Alpha can be used with great success, but this must be done in an intentional way that leads the Kerygmatic core into a Catholic understanding of the Church—especially the Eucharist. Many parishes have found great success in working with Life Teen training materials and conferences. Life Teen is a great example of a relationship-based ministry model that is firmly centered on the Holy Eucharist.





Wonder

The most important piece of knowledge that must be drilled with repetition and clear understanding is the Kerygma. The Kerygma is the most basic understanding of who God is, what He did, and what it means for our lives. We cannot assume that young people already understand this clearly. The New Evangelization is a challenge to awaken the sleeping faith of those who are already in the pews, attending sacrament preparation, and students in our Catholic Schools. Knowledge of the faith is propelled forward by desire. If desire can be activated, a person will spend their whole lives growing in knowledge and formation of the faith. Therefore, great importance should be given to activating that sense of desire. This is the human faculty of wonder.

Much of what has been stated in this handbook also applies to preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation. Many people who walk through the doors of the church to participate in the sacraments, have not yet been evangelized. There is a fundamental lack among young people of a world-view rooted in the Christian claim. This can present a difficult situation if the opposite assumption is made. This necessitates, as much as possible, finding opportunities for the Kerygma to be repeated. The sacraments are given for the mission of the Church. They unite us to our Lord, our Beloved. The mission of youth groups, faith formation programs, and sacrament programs is to create disciples of Jesus Christ. In Confirmation, we receive the sacramental graces of the Holy Spirit in a unique way. However, this outpouring of graces is meant to be continual and lifelong.



AUTHENTIC OUTCOMES

Some caution should be exercised when it comes to the expectation of Catholics after Confirmation. The phrase 'active in the parish' does not adequately describe the universal call to holiness. The Church is called to make disciples and we should always be on guard against the 'heresy of good works,' which is simply a frenzy of activities. Emphasis should be placed on growth in personal prayer life, the discernment of one's vocation, and a life that is well-lived in the presence of God.

“It is Jesus in fact that you seek when you dream of happiness; he is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; he is the beauty to which you are so attracted; it is he who provokes you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise; it is he who urges you to shed the masks of a false life; it is he who reads in your hearts your most genuine choices, the choices that others try to stifle. It is Jesus who stirs in you the desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be ground down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and more fraternal.”

—St. John Paul II

Conclusion

We will leave you lastly with the words
of the great Saint, Pope John Paul II:

*“The vitality of youth is an excellence
which God so delights in. Rather than
fighting against what is great about
young people, let us discern with them
who God has made them to be.”*

God bless you.



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