

Catholic Parent Page

The Impact of Relational Ministry

What is Relational Ministry?

Relational ministry, sometimes called discipleship, refers to the formation of young people as disciples in the faith. This approach to ministry focuses on the relationships formed with trusted adults, not just the programs held at the church. Relationships, especially with God and others, are at the heart of true conversion and necessary for being strengthened in the faith. In order to bring young people into a relationship with God, adult mentors accompany and foster relationships with them. Relationships built in this capacity provide young people with the witness and practical support for living out the Catholic faith. This concept of mentorship is essential and extremely effective in building up the Body of Christ and providing young people with opportunities to encounter Jesus in real and meaningful ways.

For these reasons, it is critical that young people are accompanied in their Catholic faith and that this accompaniment comes from their **own parish**. Relational ministry is an approach utilized by both Catholic and non-Catholic church communities to help young people grow deeper in their faith. When these relationships are formed outside the Catholic community, no matter how well-intentioned, it is a risk for young people to seek answers from adults who offer guidance and understanding contrary to Catholic teaching. Recognizing this also challenges us to build up a culture of relational ministry in our own parishes, so that young people can seek formation in the life of Christian discipleship within the fullness of Truth found in the Church.



St. John Bosco & Relational Ministry

St. John Bosco is one of the greatest examples of relational ministry and discipleship within the Catholic Church. We can look to his example as we work to develop our own systems of relational ministry and discipleship in our parishes.

"The reason he was successful in generating religious enthusiasm in young people and transforming into faithful Christian disciples is because he spent countless hours with the boys, getting to know them by name, loving and playing games with them, teaching and taking care of them."

John Bosco and his band of priests & brothers practiced small-group discipleship and relationship ministry. Their daily contact with the boys enabled them to apprentice in how to acquire the spiritual life necessary for living out the call to faithful, life-long Christian discipleship. It also enabled them to hold the boys accountable."

(<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2015/06/04/youth-ministry-today-its-strengths-and-limitations/>)

The Effectiveness of Relational Ministry

"Increasingly isolated youth connect to faith through relationship"

- "There is a reality that young people do not trust adults. Only 8% of respondents ages 13-25 who are affiliated with a religious group have a trusted religious leader they could turn to (2020 study)."
- "Further data from this study showed that 10,516 young people who have adult mentors are more likely to have a sense of meaning and purpose. This study argues that trusting mentor relationships are key to having a lasting influence in the lives of youth."

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/study-increasingly-isolated-youth-connect-faith-through-relationship>

Diocese of Arlington on Relational Ministry

- "Youth ministry is not simply about bringing young people to the faith today, it is about keeping them active in their faith for the rest of their lives."
- "The National Study on Youth and Religion (2003-2015) found that, *'One of clearest indicators of whether a teen will remain in the faith as a young adult is how many adults in the community they knew by name as a teen. For every adult they knew as a teen, they are several percentage points more likely to still be active as a young adult.'*"

https://www.arlingtondiocese.org/uploadedImages/CDA/Assets/PDF/Youth%20Ministry/2020/3%20Relational%20Ministry_BLUE.pdf

"Forming Missionary Disciples – Now"

- "When forming young disciples, we must be willing to be among those we wish to form into disciples, to establish relationships with them and to walk with them as they form a relationship with Christ. Relational ministry calls us out of ourselves to meet the young person where they are and walk with them."

<https://catholiclife.dioc.org/2021/08/17/forming-missionary-disciples-now/>

Lifeteen Core Team Training for Catholic Youth Ministry

- "At its simplest form, relational ministry is building Christ centered relationships with teenagers by going where they are: school, work and play. Relationships are at the heart of true conversion. In order to bring teens into a relationship with Christ, we must be willing to engage in a relationship with them. Only then can they experience the love of Christ through adult Core Members who themselves are in love with Christ. Relational ministry is all about "outreach" and "inreach" to teens, both the church and un-church."

https://www.arlingtondiocese.org/uploadedImages/CDA/Assets/PDF/Youth%20Ministry/2020/3%20Relational%20Ministry_BLUE.pdf

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Our Lady of Hope Parish (OH) on Relational Ministry

- "Relational ministry is a journey where the leader accompanies the participant along the path to Heaven. The relationships built provide practical support for living as a Christian, as well as an extraordinary witness to the love and value God places on every single person. The methods of relational ministry are as varied as the circumstances in which it is utilized. No matter the method, the goal is the same: to build up the Body of Christ, and most especially, to provide opportunities for people to connect with Jesus in real, personal, and meaningful ways."

<https://www.oloheparishfamily.org/youth-ministry/relational-ministry>