

IMPLEMENTING
**HIGH SCHOOL
YOUTH FORMATION**



THE DIOCESE OF
HOUMA  THIBODAUX

Office of Parish Support

HIGH SCHOOL FORMATION | WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW?

At the heart of the vision for youth formation is a focus to the Lord's commission to "make disciples" by accompanying teens through an intentional discipleship process.

- Discipleship as a movement of the heart | Understanding the process of spiritual formation and what a "discipleship process" for a young person looks like is essential. While we know that God is the one who transforms, forms, and teaches us, we can learn about the dynamics that can assist the process of spiritual formation with intentionality. A key component of this is what we refer to as the Formation Life Cycle or "the 5": Connect, Encounter, Conversion, Grow, Mission.
- Forming the whole person | We can no longer focus solely on intellectual formation. We must focus on forming the young person in the areas of: human formation, spiritual formation, intellectual formation, and equipping them for mission.
- Updating pastoral practices | We must learn new methods of presenting the timeless truths of the Gospel, we must update pastoral practices in order to provide an environment conducive for our young people to encounter the person of Jesus Christ, to grow as his disciples, and to be equipped for mission.
- Mentoring and accompaniment | We must move from a model of mere "teaching" to a model of "mentoring" that allows us to meet every young person exactly where they are and then, in patience and love, accompany them towards a person, Jesus Christ. This will require first that all adults are growing as disciples themselves. After all, it takes a disciple to make a disciple.
- A team approach | The Church's vision for a more holistic youth formation will require a team approach. As we transition to a new model of forming young disciples, it is imperative that everyone involved in the formation of our young people is working together as a team with a unified purpose and approach. This will require some time and intentionality.
- Formation through graduation not Confirmation | High School Youth Formation should be available to all high school students, including seniors. We may need to evaluate: are we offering opportunities for our young people to engage in formation after receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation? Or are we treating Confirmation as the "finish line"? Additionally, our approach to Confirmation preparation is important. When incorporated as part of an *ongoing process of discipleship formation*, Confirmation is less seen as "the last step in the journey", but as a means for continued and enhanced growth and participation. More details can be found in the Confirmation Policy.

HIGH SCHOOL FORMATION | WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

THE LITURGY

The Mass is central to all youth formation... everything we do should flow in and out of the Eucharist. If your formation times are able to come either before or after the Mass, that is ideal.

MENTORS

Recruiting and forming mentors is a necessary step in the process and is fundamental to the new model of youth formation. It is essential that the adult mentors are part of a community of disciples. If we hope to accompany young people through a discipleship process, we must first allow ourselves to be accompanied. While the team formation should incorporate some practical elements (how to lead in small groups, etc), this time is largely focused on the spiritual formation of the team as well as growing in community. The most effective discipleship happens in the context of a healthy Christian community. This is why you'll want to nurture the adults involved to truly become a "community of disciples".

When planning your calendar, consider setting aside significant time for team formation *before* engaging the young people. Spending time at the beginning, establishing and maintaining this community aspect is imperative. When young people see and experience a group of adults who are authentic in their love for Christ and for one another, it is attractive! Once you begin regularly meeting with the teens, don't forget to schedule ongoing opportunities for the continued formation of the team. Consider one week a month where the teens are off and the team is able to meet.

PARENTS

It is essential to consider parents as an irreplaceable component to any youth formation process in the parish. We should always try to strive to find ways to engage and support parents in their own faith formation and in their role of forming their children as disciples of Jesus Christ. Intentional communication is a great place to begin with parents. You'll want to share with them what you are committed to and what you are asking them to commit to as you partner together in the formation of their children.

LARGE GROUP NIGHTS

Large group nights include all high school students, grades 9-12. (In some parishes, this group may not be large in number. The role of the large group night is less about the number of people and more about the structure of the night. If your "large group" is still a small group in number, that's OK!) We recommend using the Life Teen format of gather, proclaim, break, and send.

- Start with the GATHER. The gather provides a space for us to intentionally welcome the teens. It often includes a game or activity that is designed to help the young people get comfortable, to begin to engage, and to introduce the topic of the night. Most importantly, it is an opportunity for the mentors to engage the teens and to make them feel like they belong.
- Move into the PROCLAIM. The proclaim is the portion of the night in which we aim to share the Gospel message within teen culture. For high school, the ideal time for a proclaim is about 10-15 minutes. The message that is shared in the proclaim will be what the youth are invited to process and internalize more deeply during the break.
- The BREAK provides the space for the youth to process the information from the proclaim. It also allows for the strengthening of relationships and helps foster openness to prayer. While there are several different options for the break, small group discussion is the most common. The goal of the break is for the teen to be able internalize and make applicable the proclamation they just heard.
- The SEND allows the youth to bring the discussion that occurs in the break to prayer. It is meant to provide an intentional time for prayer to bring those things to God and then to be sent out on mission.

SMALL GROUPS

Small groups provide a place to really build trust and accompany the young people. Small groups can be offered as a stand alone event and/or part of a large group night. As we move forward with formation in the large group setting, we should be assessing and discerning when it might be appropriate to introduce regular small groups. Keep an eye on how are they doing with the small group time (break) within the large group night. Are they growing more comfortable with sharing? Are they desiring more small group time?

HIGH SCHOOL FORMATION | STEP BY STEP

STEP 1: BUILD YOUR YOUTH FORMATION TEAM

The Youth Formation Team consists of 3-5 key people who will help with discernment, planning, and coordinating efforts for all aspects of Youth Formation in the parish: this may be the CYF and a few others.

STEP 2: BUILD YOUR MENTOR TEAM

Do we have the right volunteers? You'll want to start by assessing your current volunteers and assist them in discerning if they feel called to move forward with the new vision for youth formation. Some may decide to move elsewhere and others will want to be involved in the new mentorship model.

You will also likely need to consider new people to recruit. God knows who they are, we just have to ask Him. Once you've prayed and identified some names, invite these people to learn more about the vision for formation and allow space for them to discern if God is calling them to participate.

OPS is ready to support you in the process of discerning, recruiting, and vision casting for volunteers. Your liaison is available to provide more detailed support and to walk with you in the process.

STEP 3: COMMUNICATION AND VISION CASTING TO PARENTS

Good communication is essential with parents... especially if we are looking to implement change. We owe it to the parents to communicate clearly and efficiently. Just like we committed time to clearly communicate the vision to the volunteers and possible new mentors, the same is true for our parents.

OPS can help with some resources on communicating the vision to parents.

STEP 4: FOCUS ON MENTOR FORMATION

It's time to start building the calendar. Start by identifying your plan for the formation of your team. When planning your calendar, consider setting aside significant time for team formation *before* engaging the young people. Once you begin regularly meeting with the teens, don't forget to schedule ongoing opportunities for continued formation of the team. Consider one week a month where the young people are off and the team is able to meet for their ongoing formation.

STEP 5: ADD IN LARGE GROUP NIGHTS

Once you've identified some time for mentor formation, begin working in your large group gatherings. Perhaps start with a kick-off night or something fun to get everyone excited about being there.

In the first year of transition, you may consider this format (gather, proclaim, break, send) for most, if not all, of your gatherings. As we ease our teens into something new, it may be most fruitful to have these types of opportunities more regularly. Determine how often you will meet based on your discerned priorities.

STEP 6: ADD IN SMALL GROUP NIGHTS

Small groups provide a place to really build trust and accompany the young people. As we move forward with high school formation in the large group setting, we should be assessing and discerning when it might be appropriate to introduce regular small groups.

STEP 7 : DISCERN OTHER EXPERIENCES

Consider when and where you can add in other opportunities such as social events, conferences and events, discipleship groups, bible studies, etc. It is important to be assessing where the youth are and discerning when and where particular opportunities may be incorporated to best serve them.