

Introduction



Youth Ministry as Encounter and Adventure

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

LUKE 1:26-33 (NAB)¹

Youth ministry provides an encounter with the love of Christ and supports youth in the adventure of discipleship. We see this pattern in the exchange between the angel Gabriel and the teenage Mary. Gabriel is speaking on God's behalf and telling Mary that she is beautiful, she is beloved, and God has a plan for her life. All of us, as leaders in youth ministry, are like Gabriel. We speak on God's behalf and share God's love and longing for youth as we invite youth to follow God's plan as young disciples.

To be messengers of God's love and invitation, we need to see youth in the way that God sees them. At World Youth Day in Sydney (2008), Pope Benedict XVI warned youth about those who see them in a narrow, opportunistic way:

Do not be fooled by those who see you as just another consumer in a market of undifferentiated possibilities, where choice itself becomes the good, novelty usurps beauty, and subjective experience displaces truth.²

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We see youth as God’s beloved and treat them as treasured members of the community as well as coworkers in our mission. This means that we look beyond any singular role of a young person. Dr. Christian Smith, Director for the Study of Religion and Society at the University of Notre Dame, recently wrote to youth workers on this topic:

Young people, especially in view of the gospel, are fundamentally persons, not students.... We should ... push back on society’s labels by insisting that teenagers are referenced by the full depth, richness, and complexity of their personhood. They should be hearing from us: “Unlike most of the rest of society, we understand and value you in the fullness of who you are. Here among God’s people we know you as real human persons—you don’t have to perform to be accepted here. Please be your real selves.”³

To become a sign of God’s love, we also need to see ourselves as a faith community, as revealing the face of Christ to youth.

Part of the vision of youth ministry is to present to youth the richness of the person of Christ, which perhaps exceeds the ability of one person to capture, but which might be effected by the collective ministry of the many persons who make up the Church.⁴

A VISION OF YOUTH MINISTRY

Throughout the documents, and teachings of over three decades of Catholic youth ministry, we see this essential pattern for ministry with young people: provide an encounter with Christ and support youth in their “yes” to the invitation to the adventure of discipleship. This encounter and invitation strengthen the ways that God has walked with young people and their families through childhood and prepares youth for the questions, challenges, and opportunities of adult faithful living. We support youth and their families along this distinctive path that their journey takes during the adolescent years.

To be faithful in our part of facilitating God’s encounter and communicating God’s invitation will take the full breadth of our commitment and resources:

- We need to *cast a wide net*. Viewing all youth as God’s beloved means we go beyond serving just those youth who present themselves. We look at the full spectrum of youth in our community from those in need of healing and outreach to the youth who are ready for engagement in witness, ministry, and service.
- We need to *go deep*. The vision for Catholic youth ministry as presented by the United States Catholic Bishops in *Renewing the Vision: A Frame-*

work for Catholic Youth Ministry and in the *National Directory for Catechesis* focuses on the call to youth in the adventure of discipleship. The consistent messages to young people by Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI at World Youth Days have been about challenge and going beyond the expectations of popular culture. Youth are hungry for the challenge of discipleship. They long to experience an invitation that is bold and big enough for their life's dreams and visions. Our efforts in youth ministry should feed that hunger and help youth to grow deeply in their faith.

- We need to ***make it personal***. Youth long to experience God in a personal way and to feel personally invited and connected to the faith community. To be personal does not mean that we organize ministries around our personality. Making it personal means that, as a community, we strive to make a personal connection with youth as we help them know Jesus in a variety of ways.
- We need to ***put all of our oars in the water, going the same direction***. When faith communities bicker over methodologies and compete for perceived limitations in resources, facilities, and time, we end up going in circles in our efforts for pastoral ministry with youth. Effective youth ministry requires the concerted, collaborative, and coordinated efforts of a faith community that longs to become Christ's love incarnate in the lives of young people today.

The encounter and adventure that God has planned for young people in our communities is within our means. This book is designed to guide leaders as they recall the vision for Catholic youth ministry and seek to make this vision a reality for youth in their parish, school, diocese, and youth-serving agency.



Reading This Book

This book is a group project by the core staff and key adjunct staff of the Center for Ministry Development. Three decades of training, research, and developing resources lead us to provide this book to leaders in Catholic youth ministry. We envision leaders engaging with the chapters of this book in ways that match their individual starting points and leadership needs. Pastors, parish council members, Directors of Religious Education, Youth Ministry Coordinators, youth ministry volunteers, youth leaders, and parents will all find information and practical ideas.

Each of the four sections of this book provides a different vantage point for viewing the dimensions of Catholic youth ministry. Let your journey with this book begin with the topics you need most and lead you to further explore the growing resources available for leaders in Catholic youth ministry.

Section I: Foundations for Youth Ministry

This section examines the history and context for Catholic youth ministry while looking at young people today, providing a summary of the vision for ministry, exploring the cultural context for youth ministry, and applying the latest research in viewing practical models and elements in effective youth ministry.

Section II: Communities Nurturing Youth

This section examines three essential communities that nurture youth: the peer community, the family, and the parish.

Section III: Promoting Personal and Spiritual Growth of Youth

This section explores several of the components for youth ministry that comprise the foundations for gathered and non-gathered ministry programs and strategies.

Section IV: Planning and Leadership for Youth Ministry

This section provides practical ways to develop leaders and engage in visioning and planning for dynamic ministry with youth.



We're Here to Help with Support on the Web

The Center for Ministry Development has over thirty years of experience helping parishes get started and enhance their ministry efforts. We are supporting this book with planning guides, meeting outlines, power point presentations, and practical tips that will be available to you online as part of your book purchase.

These materials will be provided at a special website designed for this book. Go to: www.cmdnet.org/leadingyouthministry.



Where Should I Start?

In implementing youth ministry, parish communities and leaders have a variety of situations and hopes that guide the place where each needs to start. Each perspective may have a different path through the chapters of this resource. Below you will find a sample for starting points and paths through the chapters that get you started. The remaining chapters will be a resource for the growth for which you are hoping.

We are just getting started in youth ministry.

Start with Chapter 1: A Vision for Comprehensive Youth Ministry, Chapter 3: Understanding Youth Today, and Chapter 5: Models for Effective Youth Ministry. This will give you the big picture. Next, go to Chapter 14: Youth Ministry Leadership, and Chapter 15: Visioning and Planning for Youth Ministry. These chapters will help you organize and begin planning with a leadership team. The remaining chapters will be there to help you continue to grow.

We have a good youth ministry, but we're ready to grow.

Start with Chapter 5: Models for Youth Ministry. Use these ideas to assess your current model and to identify strengths and areas to grow. Use Chapter 14: Youth Ministry Leadership, and Chapter 15: Visioning and Planning for Youth Ministry, to begin a process of including new leaders and planning for enhanced youth ministry efforts. Once you identify the places you need to grow, the remaining chapters will help you.

We want to learn about how to include more youth in our ministries.

Start with Chapter 10: Evangelization of Youth. This chapter will put your outreach and invitation into the context of the vision of Church. Continue with Chapter 1: A Vision for Comprehensive Youth Ministry, Chapter 3: Understanding Youth Today, Chapter 4: Ministry with Youth in a Culturally Diverse Church, and Chapter 5: Models for Effective Youth Ministry. These chapters will help identify the diverse starting points and needs of youth in your community. Consider Chapter 6: Building community with Youth, Chapter 7: Connecting with Families, and Chapter 8: Connecting Youth with the Parish Community. These chapters will help provide practical starting points for inviting and responding to youth and their families.

We want to improve our adolescent catechesis efforts.

Start with Chapter 10: Evangelization of Youth, and Chapter 9: Catechesis with Youth. These chapters present the vision for evangelizing and catechizing youth. Continue with Chapter 3: Understanding Youth Today, Chapter 7: Connecting with Families, and Chapter 8: Connecting Youth with the Parish Community to explore the settings for faith learning and the needs of youth and families today. Use Chapter 14: Youth Ministry Leadership, and Chapter 15: Visioning and Planning for Youth Ministry to plan for renewed efforts and include additional leaders.



We Are On This Journey with You

This book is a summary of what we know so far and we hope it provides the beginning of continued exploration and searching. We also hope you find yourself in the questions, ideas, and insights of this book. After all, the direction for this book came from conversations with you, the leaders of Catholic youth ministry. Read the book and talk about it with colleagues. Continue your own searching in this shared quest to bring our best leadership in this shared mission of helping youth encounter Christ and engage in active discipleship.

— ENDNOTES —

1. Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. Board of Trustees. 1996, 1986. *The New American Bible: Translated from the original languages with critical use of all the ancient sources and the revised New Testament* (Lk 1:26–33).
2. Pope Benedict XVI, Message to Youth, World Youth Day 2008, Sydney, Australia. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/july/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080717_barangaroo_en.html (accessed October 23, 2008).
3. Smith, Dr. Christian. “Stop Calling Kids ‘Students,’” *Group Magazine*, Volume 34, No. 6. September-October 2008 (Loveland, Colorado: Group Publications), p. 8.
4. *A Vision of Youth Ministry* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops), 1976, p. 24.