

A Comprehensive Youth Ministry Mindset

(from *Celebrate Youth*)

Catholic Youth Ministry needs room to grow. We need to minister with the diverse youth of today. We need room in our ministries for new, creative ideas and ministry responses. We need room to embrace the families of youth with care, support and resources. We need to make room for the people of our parish communities to become involved with youth by sharing their gifts and experiences. We need room for partners: people, agencies and congregations in our community that care about youth as we do. We need to make room in our mindset as leaders for a renewed vision of ministry.

The Catholic Bishops of the United States have published *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* (RTV) to publicly renew their commitment to young people and to help parish communities make room for a new generation of disciples. *Renewing the Vision*, affirms the 1976 *Vision of Youth Ministry* document and brings together all of the experiences, resources, the joys and struggles of the last two decades of youth ministry.

Renewing the Vision is most importantly an affirmation of the faith, gifts, energy and fresh ideas of young people... It is a call to empower young people for the mission they have been given by the Lord Jesus. (RTV 2)

In their new document, the Bishops celebrate the growth of the church's ministry with youth and call the Church community to reach out to young people with renewed zeal. The Bishops ask us to consider the reality of adolescence in our culture; youth today face many challenges as they grow to adulthood. They also share with us the good news of positive youth development and the proven effectiveness of youth ministry efforts. Most of all, they call the whole community to join in the effort to help young people grow as disciples. All of us contribute to this effort, as individuals, as families, as community organizations, as service groups and as a parish community.

Over the past two decades, some parish youth ministry efforts have focused on a few key leaders who work to organize one or two ministry programs. In our renewed vision, we open up the possibilities for ministry by stretching previously held notions and limits. We call this a comprehensive mindset. Our mindset, or vision for ministry, is comprehensive because we make room for different kinds of youth, different ministry responses and different resources. When we adapt a comprehensive mindset, we see the resources of our community. We will see the alternative ways to meet our goals. We will begin to see problems as opportunities.

A Framework for Comprehensive Ministry with Adolescents

The comprehensive approach is not a single program or recipe for ministry. Rather, it provides a way for integrating ministry with adolescents and their families into the total life and mission of the Church, recognizing that the whole community is responsible for ministry with adolescents and their families. The comprehensive approach uses all of our resources as a faith community – people, ministries, programs, resources – in a common effort to promote the three goals of the Church’s ministry with adolescents. The goals for ministry with adolescents help us keep our vision focused on the objectives. The themes provide a continuous thread that ensures that ministry with adolescents utilizes all available resources and is all-inclusive. The components highlight specific areas of ministry for a comprehensive approach. By offering this framework we seek to provide direction to the Church’s ministry and affirm and encourage local creativity. (RTV 19-20)

In *Renewing the Vision*, the United States Catholic Bishops offer a framework for Catholic youth ministry. This vision does not provide a program model or a prescriptive method for developing ministry. Rather, it offers a framework, a structure that has room for a variety of parishes to develop youth ministry in a variety of ways. Like the blueprints for building a home, this framework provides important elements that guide us as we create youth ministry. The framework for Catholic youth ministry includes the following five elements.

- **Definition**
- **Goals**
- **Themes**
- **Ministry Components**
- **Ministry Settings**

Definition of Catholic Youth Ministry

The definition of youth ministry offered by the Bishops is formed by our love for and our commitment to youth: youth have needs we care for and gifts to share. “Youth ministry is the response of the Christian community to the needs of young people and the sharing of the unique gifts of youth with the larger community” (RTV 1).

The Bishops remind us to see within youth the incredible potential and capacities they have now and to respond to their present and real needs. Youth ministry does not exist because youth are particularly troubled or needy. Youth are growing in ways intended by our loving God. They are encountering the joys and the challenges of life as adolescents in our time. They have wonderful gifts to offer in the midst of their growing pains. We minister to youth because we are church and we follow the pattern of Jesus: we respond to needs and empower youth to use and share their gifts.

Three Goals of Catholic Youth Ministry

In *Renewing the Vision*, three goals serve as directions for ministry with youth.

Goal 1: Empowerment

To empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today.
(RTV 9)

We know that young people are seeking. Youth seek to find the adventure of their lifetime. They look for a way to contribute something important to the world. They look for a cause to belong to, a cause to throw their life into. As a faith community, we offer young people the challenge of life as a disciple of Jesus Christ. This effort includes...

- providing a spiritually challenging and world shaping vision for life.
- evangelizing youth, drawing youth into personal relationships with Jesus Christ.
- calling youth to discipleship.
- providing opportunities for youth to join in service, ministry and leadership.
- providing catechesis for youth.
- helping youth to explore their vocation.

Goal 2: Participation

To draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission, and work of the Catholic faith community. (RTV 11)

We know that young people are striving to be part of a community. They long to belong to others. They want to feel connected to people with whom they will feel safe. As a Church, we offer young people community. We help them to become more connected in their own families, in our parishes and in the wider community.

Renewing the Vision identifies four important faith communities for young people: the family, the parish, the Catholic school, and the youth-serving organization. We help youth connect to a network of support in their various communities. This effort includes...

- supporting families of youth by providing resources, programs and information;
- integrating youth into the life of the parish community;
- promoting belonging in the Catholic school community;
- building participation in youth-serving organizations.

Goal 3: Growth

To foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person. (RTV 15)

We know that young people are growing. This time in their life brings dramatic physical, social, intellectual and spiritual changes. As the body of Christ, we offer youth a place to grow. We offer experiences and opportunities for youth to grow in positive ways, to learn their faith and use their gifts in service to others. As a community, we use our creativity and resources to respond to youth that are seeking, striving and growing. We foster this growth through our active engagement of youth in the life of our communities. We seek to...

- support the development of healthy, competent, caring and faith-filled youth.
- address their unique developmental, social and religious needs.
- foster positive adolescent development.
- promote Catholic identity.
- address the obstacles and challenges to healthy development.

Seven Themes of Comprehensive Youth Ministry

The themes of a comprehensive vision presented in *Renewing the Vision* provide a guide for ministry development that helps us to use all of our resources and to be inclusive and responsive in our ministry efforts.

Developmentally Appropriate

Effective ministry responds to the developmental growth of young and older adolescents by developing programs and strategies that are age-appropriate and strategically focused to contribute to the positive development of youth.

Family Friendly

Effective ministry recognizes the family as an important setting for ministry and provides links between the programs of youth ministry and the family home through the sharing of information, inclusive programs and resources.

Intergenerational

Effective ministry utilizes the intergenerational parish community by developing shared programs and by connecting youth to adults in the community.

Multicultural

Effective ministry provides for ministry to youth in the context of their culture and ethnic heritage. Effective ministry also promotes cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

Community-wide Collaboration

Effective ministry promotes collaboration with leaders, agencies and congregations in the wider community. This collaboration includes sharing information, sponsoring programs and developing advocacy efforts.

Leadership

Effective ministry mobilizes the people of the faith community to become involved in youth ministry efforts by providing for diverse roles and commitments for adults and youth.

Flexible and Adaptable Programming

Effective ministry provides flexible and adaptable program structures and ministry responses to address the variety of youth and families in our communities.

Eight Components of Comprehensive Youth Ministry

The components describe specific areas of the mission of the Church that work together to provide ministry with adolescents.

These components provide a framework for the Catholic community to respond to the needs of young people and to involve young people in sharing their unique gifts with the larger community. (RTV 26)

The components support and enhance each other. Our ministry becomes more effective when we work to balance our ministry response across the eight ministry areas. This balance is not necessarily achieved by developing separate ministry programs in each component; sometimes a single program, such as a retreat, incorporates several ministry components. We look for balance over a season or year of ministry to determine response in these components. (The following descriptions of the eight components are excerpted from pages 26-47 of *Renewing the Vision*.)

Advocacy

The ministry of advocacy engages the Church to examine its priorities and practices to determine how well young people are integrated into the life, mission, and work of the Catholic community. It places adolescents and families first by analyzing every policy and program – diocesan, parish, domestic, and international – for its impact on adolescents and families. Poor, vulnerable, and at-risk adolescents have first claim on our common efforts. The ministry of advocacy fights economic and social forces which threaten adolescents and family life, such as poverty, joblessness, lack of access to affordable health care, lack of decent housing, and discrimination. The ministry of advocacy supports policies and programs that support and empower adolescents and their families and work to overcome poverty, provide decent jobs, and promote equal opportunity. In all advocacy efforts we must remember to focus on adolescents and families with the greatest need. This is the “option for the poor” in action. (*Putting Children and Families First*).

Catechesis

The ministry of catechesis helps adolescents *develop* a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and the Christian community, *increase* their knowledge of the core content of the Catholic faith. The ministry of catechesis also helps young people *enrich* and *expand* their understanding of the Scriptures and the sacred Tradition and their application to life today, and *live* more faithfully as disciples of Jesus Christ in their daily lives, especially through a life of prayer, justice and loving service. Genuine faith is a total response of the whole person – mind, heart, and will. The ministry of catechesis fosters growth in Catholic faith in all three dimensions – trusting (heart), believing (mind), and doing (will).

Community Life

The ministry of community life *builds* an environment of love, support, appreciation for diversity, and judicious acceptance which models Catholic principles; *develops* meaningful relationships; and *nurtures* Catholic faith. The content of our message will be heard only when it is lived in our relationships and community life. To teach compassion, generosity, tolerance, peace, forgiveness, acceptance, and love as gospel values and to identify ourselves as Christians requires us to live these values in our interactions with young people and in our community life. ...The ministry of Community Life is not only *what* we do (activity), but *who* we are (identity) and *how* we interact (relationships).

Evangelization

The ministry of evangelization shares the good news of the reign of God and invites young people to hear about the Word Made Flesh. Drawing from Jesus' example, evangelization involves the community's pronouncement and living witness that the reign of God has become realized in and through Jesus. The starting point for the ministry of Evangelization "is our recognition of the presence of God already in young people, their experiences, their families, and their culture. ...Evangelization, therefore, enables young people to uncover and name the experience of God already active and present in their lives. This provides an openness to the gift of the Good News of Jesus Christ" (*Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization* 7-8) ...The ministry of Evangelization incorporates several essential elements: *witness, outreach, proclamation, invitation, conversion, and discipleship.*

Justice and Service

The ministry of justice and service *nurtures* in young people a social consciousness and a commitment to a life of justice and service rooted in their faith in Jesus Christ, in the Scriptures, and in Catholic social teaching; *empowers* young people to work for justice by concrete efforts to address the causes of human suffering, to serve those in need, to pursue peace, and to defend the life, dignity, and rights of all people; *infuses* the concepts of justice, peace, and human dignity into all ministry efforts.

Leadership Development

The ministry of leadership development *calls forth, affirms, and empowers* the diverse gifts, talents, and abilities of adults and young people in our faith communities for comprehensive ministry with adolescents. Leadership roles in adolescent ministry are key. Leaders must be trained and encouraged. This approach involves a wide diversity of adult *and* youth leaders in a variety of roles. Many will be involved in direct ministry with adolescents, others will provide support services, and yet others will link the ministry effort to the resources of the broader community.

Pastoral Care

The ministry of pastoral care is a compassionate presence in imitation of Jesus' care of people, especially those who are hurting and in need. The ministry of pastoral care involves *promoting* positive adolescent and family development through a variety of positive (preventive) strategies; *caring* for adolescents and families in crisis through support, counseling, and referral to appropriate community agencies; *providing guidance* as young people face life decisions and make moral choices; and *challenging* systems that are obstacles to positive development (*advocacy*). Pastoral care is most fundamentally a relationship – a ministry of compassionate presence. This was Jesus' caring stance toward all people, especially those who were hurting or in need. Pastoral care enables healing and growth to take place within individuals and their relationships. It nurtures growth toward wholeness.

Prayer and Worship

The ministry of prayer and worship *celebrates and deepens* young people's relationship with Jesus Christ through the bestowal of grace, communal prayer and liturgical experiences; it *awakens* their awareness of the spirit at work in their lives; it *incorporates* young people more fully into the sacramental life of the Church, especially Eucharist; it *nurtures* the personal prayer of young people; and it *fosters* family rituals and prayer.

Ministry Settings for Comprehensive Youth Ministry

To open up opportunities, we look to all of our resources. Four settings for youth ministry create possibilities and inspire our shared creativity.

Youth

We most commonly associate this first setting with youth ministry: ministry to and with youth. This includes the variety of ways that we gather young people for shared ministry. Youth group meetings, social, sporting events, youth retreats, youth service events and special youth prayer services are examples of gathered ministries in the youth setting. Sometimes we provide specialized programs for small groups of young people. For example, in one parish, within a few weeks time, several youth experienced the loss of one of their parents due to death or divorce. (*continued*)

The youth ministry team responded by inviting these young people to a program designed specifically to help them pray through the grieving process. These young people also experienced the support from peers and adults in the community. Often times we do not gather youth together to minister to them. We provide them with resources. Many parishes develop a card that fits in a young person's wallet or purse. This card includes hot-line support telephone numbers for their area. Other parishes organize teams of adults and youth to be present at high school football games, concerts, plays and other events where young people are present.

Family

Ministry in the family setting includes the variety of ways that we support families as they share faith together in the home. This includes programs designed to help parents communicate with their adolescents. Resources that help families to pray and share together are also part of this setting. An important process in the family setting is building bridges between youth programs and the home. With strategies as simple as developing information packets for parents when youth attend a program, parents will know what their children are experiencing; they are better prepared to support these efforts.

Parish

The parish setting includes the many ways that youth experience ministry through the life of the parish itself. How do we include the gifts of youth and respond to their needs through our parish liturgies? What can we do to help youth join the central prayer of our faith? Some communities prepare liturgies that include youth in the liturgical ministries and youth examples in the prayers and homilies. The parish's community life becomes a place to minister to youth when we pay attention to their needs and their gifts. For example, when planning a parish mission or a parish-wide service event, parishes consider its young members. Parish link youth to the variety of service, ministry and leadership roles in the community.

Wider Community

Ministry to youth in the wider community connects youth and families to programs and resources beyond our parish. Examples are participation in inter-parish, inter-church and diocesan events, and ways that we connect youth and families to programs, resources and events in the civic community. Connecting youth to service in hospitals, soup kitchens and homeless shelters is a wonderful way for youth to develop their gifts. We take advantage of our shared strength when we come together with other people and agencies in the wider community as advocates for youth.

This is what is needed: a Church for young people, which will know how to speak to their heart and enkindle, comfort, and inspire enthusiasm in it with the joy of the Gospel and the strength of the Eucharist; a Church which will know how to invite and welcome the person who seeks a purpose for which to commit his whole existence; a Church which is not afraid to require much, after having given much; which does not fear asking from young people the effort of a noble and authentic adventure, such as that of the following of the Gospel. Pope John Paul II, 1995 World Day of Prayer for Vocations)

40 Developmental Assets for Positive Adolescent Growth

(from the Search Institute)

The following forty developmental assets have been identified through research by the Search Institute as forming a foundation for healthy development in children and adolescents. The following information is excerpted from Search Institute research (© Search Institute, 1996).

Asset Building

- Asset development begins at birth and needs to be sustained through childhood and adolescence. Each stage of development requires persistent attention to meeting young people's developmental needs.
- Asset building depends primarily on individuals – parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, and many others – building positive relationships with children and teenagers.
- Building assets also requires a highly consistent community, in which children and teenagers are exposed to clear messages about what is important.
- Family can and should be the most powerful generator of developmental assets.
- The assets are more likely to blossom if they are nurtured simultaneously by families, schools, youth organizations, neighborhoods, religious institutions, health care providers, and in the informal settings in which adults and youth interact.
- Because asset development necessitates relational, consistent, and redundant communities, all residents have a role to play.

Below are the links to the Developmental Assets Lists:

[> English](#)

[> Spanish](#)

Resources for Asset-Building

- 101 Asset Building Ideas*. (Poster) Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1998.
- Andress, Shelby I. *Working Together for Youth – A Practical Guide for Individuals and Groups*. Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1993.
- Asset-Building Resources: *Uniting Communities for Youth, Parenting with a Purpose, Learning and Living, Tapping the Potential, Renewing Hope, Finding Focus*. Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1995. (Individual booklets)
- Benson, Peter. *All Kids Are Our Kids—What Communities Must Do to Raise Caring and Responsible Children and Adolescents*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998.
- Benson, Peter, Judy Galbraith and Pamela Espeland. *What Kids Need to Succeed*. 1995.
- Healthy Communities, Healthy Youth*. (Poster) Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1998.
- Roehlkepartain, Eugene C. *Building Assets in Congregations – A Practical Guide for Helping Youth Grow Up Healthy*. Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1998.
- Roehlkepartain, Jolene. *Building Assets Together – 135 Group Activities for Helping Youth Succeed*. Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1998.

Developmental Characteristics of Adolescents

It is helpful for adults ministering with youth to be aware of the developmental characteristics of young people at various stages in their life. Of course, the following descriptions are “broad brush” pictures of young people. It is also important to remember that development does not occur uniformly within ages or even within individuals.

Younger Adolescents

10 – 15 years of age

Physical

- Are in a period of rapid change
- Are developing secondary sex characteristics and mature reproductive systems
- Are sensitive to physical changes and confused over sexual identity
- Body image greatly influences self-image.

Cognitive

- Begin abstract thinking
- Base reasoning on possibilities, not only on experience
- Use a more complex decision-making process
- Develop reflective thinking
- Tend to be self-conscious and critical
- Begin to base behavior on abstract thinking
- Are often idealistic, argumentative, and self-centered

Identity

- Want to belong
- Begin self-questioning
- Distance self from childhood (family, parental figures) and identify with peers
- Seek limited independence and autonomy

Moral

- Reason morally at conventional level
- Resolve dilemmas on the basis of expectations outside of self, such as peers, laws and significant adults

Interpersonal

- See peer-group identification and friendship as important
- Value friendships based on mutuality, trust, and loyalty

Faith

- Reflect an affiliative style of faith
- Desire active involvement and are open to doing service
- Depend on the community for the content and expression of their faith
- Begin to define their own image of God and explore a personal relationship with God

Older Adolescents

14-19 years of age

Cognitive

- Reflect a more critical consciousness
- Move toward gaining a personal value system (not only *what* I think but also *why* I think it)

Identity

- Become more accountable for “who am I” and “who am I to become”
- Question, experiment with, and reevaluate their self-concept
- Seek further autonomy from parents and carry out more independent actions
- Accept their sexuality and conceptualize their sex-role identity
- Begin to make decisions about a career and experiment with talents and abilities
- Move toward a commitment to personal religious values, vocational goals, and a philosophy of life

Moral

- Begin to recognize the complexity in making moral judgments
- Begin to internalize morality and to value preserving personal integrity

Some older adolescents

- Continue at conventional level
- Move beyond conventional level, evaluating previous principles in light of new information and experience
- Develop personal morality based on universal principles

Interpersonal

Some older adolescents

- Continue with mutuality, trust, and loyalty as the primary basis for relationships
- Are able to expand perspectives to encompass self, peers, and a larger world
- Are able to comprehend the motives, feelings, and thoughts of other individuals and groups
- Are able to realize that others act out of beliefs and values that may differ from their own

Intimacy

- Develop deep, trusting, enduring friendships with persons of the same sex and the opposite sex
- Strongly desire to be accepted and to love and be loved
- Are able to share self honestly

Faith

- Move to a searching style of faith, with critical reflection about the meaning of life
- Struggle for own faith-identity
- Tend to distance themselves from the authority of community
- Begin taking personal responsibility
- Seek conviction through critical judgment of the community’s ways
- Begin to create a faith system that is inner-directed and personally held and valued
- Develop a concern for integrity between belief and lifestyle