

Building a Sustainable Catholic Youth Ministry

The following has been adapted for Catholic parishes from the book *Sustainable Youth Ministry: Why Most Youth Ministry Doesn't Last and What Your Church Can Do About It* by Mark DeVries (InterVarsity Press, 2008). These four lists are practical considerations for building a sustainable youth ministry and are intended as working check lists for you to use in planning and developing your ministry. They are not meant to be a complete list for every parish, nor is there a strict timeline. They are simply to help you grasp the big picture and build something sustainable.

Stage 1: Creating the Blueprint, Preparing for the Process

This is your first month or two on the job - as you get to know your parish and its the people, create the blueprint for your ministry. Begin by getting to know your pastor and his vision for youth ministry.

1. Find or Create Your Control Documents:

- Directory of youth, including numbers of registered teens in each grade.
- Twelve-month major event calendar
 - What are the normal meeting days/times?
 - What special events have been a part of youth ministry in the past (bowling, service, retreats, trips, conferences, etc.)?
 - Be sure to consider your workload as you look at the calendar: is each week, month, season, or semester realistic?
- Job description for your volunteers:
 - This might be very simple or quite specific, but know what you are inviting people to, and help them understand the commitment you are asking of them.
 - Remember that Core Team members:
 - a. Are the “heart” (Coeur/Corazon/Core) of youth ministry
 - b. Must love God and live their Catholic faith
 - c. Must care about teens and be good at interacting with them.
- List of volunteer recruiting needs:
 - Outreach to Schools/Community Team (current and # needed)
 - High School Core Team (current and # needed)
 - Middle School Core Team (current and # needed)
 - Confirmation Team (current and # needed)
 - Small Group Ministry (current and # needed)
 - Major Event Coordinators (current and # needed)
- Recruiting Pool List: Ask staff, especially the pastor, current volunteers, key parents, and key teens to name adults might be good at serving in youth ministry. Ask them to pray with you, that God would raise up new leaders. If necessary, recruit at Masses.

2. Know, Revisit, or Create Your Visioning Documents:

- Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry (USCCB)
- Christus Vivit (Pope Francis)
- Parish Mission Statement
- Safe Environment Policies
- Create three-year goals and one-year benchmarks using the Youth Ministry Grid.
- Create an organization chart for your ministry, including people and programs

Stage 2: Laying the Foundation

Youth ministry is rooted in relationships. Once you have your blueprint, the foundation is laid by focusing on building relationships with teens, parents, and the greater parish and secular community.

- Ensure that your pastor approves of your goals and vision, and remain in close communication with him as your ministry develops.
- Familiarize yourself with the Diocesan Safe Environment policies.
- Recruit your volunteer team.
 - Have everyone interested in volunteering fill out a simple volunteer application so you have their basic contact information and why they feel called to ministry.
 - Be sure to directly ask individuals to serve in youth ministry and not just make blanket requests. Follow up with those who are interested, but do not take everyone; rather, accept as volunteers only those who are can relate well to teens and joyfully witness to their own Catholic faith.
 - Ensure that each volunteer is fingerprinted/background checked and completes safe environment training. The individual volunteer can check their own prints and SE training (<https://stpetersburg.cmgconnect.org/>), and the youth minister can be given access to check their volunteers (contact Michael Craig: mjc@dosp.org).
 - Be sure to create a file for each adult volunteer to keep track of their basic info, volunteer application, the dates of completion for fingerprints/safe environment training, any certificates of completion for safe environment training or ministry related workshops, and any other notes.
- Identify all of the local public, Catholic, or other middle and high schools in your area.
 - Learn where they are on the map in relation to your parish.
 - Determine which schools are most attended by your parishioners, or at which you have teachers/coaches who are parishioners.
 - Download their school calendars and activity schedules, and visit the schools to introduce yourself to administration and key teachers/coaches.
 - Begin praying for those schools, that God would work through your team and the teens in your parish to make an impact for the Kingdom in those schools.
- Ensure that you have a clean, simple, and useful registration form/process for families to register their teens for youth ministry.
- Personally contact every teen currently in the youth ministry.
- Learn the names of every teen in the youth ministry.
- Personally contact every parent of youth in the youth ministry.
- Determine your curriculum for the year and what resources you will use.
- Be present at all the Masses in your parish for the first few weekends on the job, and then be intentional about doing so at least once per month, especially on key weekends for your ministry or for parish life.
- Develop a communications plan for your ministry:
 - Social media, email, website, regular mail, newsletters, bulletin, etc.

Stage 3: Beginning to Build

Get to know your volunteers individually and help them grow together as a team through prayer, forming them in faith, seeking their input, and equipping them for ministry. Plan the schedule and curriculum with their input and help.

- Schedule regular volunteer leader gatherings
- Schedule one-on-one, face-to-face meetings with all volunteers (get to know them well and communicate your vision).
- Make a plan for two-by-two outreach to local schools. Train your team to go out in pairs to football games, school plays, etc. to visit teens they know, to be visible in the school, and to introduce yourself to both teens and adults in the community.
- Consider hospitality and relational ministry: Ask your volunteer team to think about the “experience” of a teen on any given youth night: from the moment they pull into the parking lot to the moment they get back in the car, what is their experience like – from the teen’s perspective? What can we do to ensure that our ministry is warm and welcoming? What can we do to ensure that every teen feels seen, known, and loved?
- Develop a recruiting needs list (helpers who are not Core Team), e.g. communications coordinator (social media, bulletin, website), food coordinator, security team, hospitality team, trip or retreat coordinators, environment coordinator, etc.
- Continue to familiarize yourself with the Diocesan Safe Environment policies to ensure that your ministry develops in a safe manner.
- Plan your teen kick-off events and a (yearly or quarterly) parent information night.
- Lay out the curriculum templates for each week of the ministry year. Begin with one “semester,” thinking through what your youth nights will look like.
- Create major event binders to stay organized and keep track for next year.

Stage 4: Framing the Second Floor

It typically takes two years to build a stable youth ministry, and five years to fully put a vision into place. If you have build it sustainably, the youth ministry will be ready to grow and deepen by after two years. How is God calling this ministry to grow between the two- and five-year marks?

- **How is God calling your ministry to deepen and develop?**
 - Develop outreach ministry to teens on school campuses, the local neighborhoods, or local community centers.
 - Teen apprenticeship/mentoring process
 - Peer ministry/leadership team
 - Giving teens a voice within youth ministry, in the broader parish, or on the parish council.
 - Parent engagement and support activities
 - Game plan for integrating youth into the life of the larger Church
 - Further developing youth liturgies or sacramental experiences, both in the larger parish and specific to youth ministry events.
 - Strategic plan for transitioning teens from middle school to high school ministry, and from high school ministry into college or young adult ministry.
 - Execute one high-impact/high-visibility program or event.
 - Game plan for small group ministry beyond normal youth nights
 - Update youth ministry facilities or youth room