

Advocacy

Unlike the other components, Advocacy is not something that you do with young people, as much as it is something you do for young people. Your job is to constantly speak for the young people of the parish, and to challenge other adults in the parish to be involved in the lives of young people. You are the Coordinator of Youth Ministry, and in turn, you can teach the rest of the adults in the parish to be “youth ministers.”



Here are 10 concrete ways that you can be an advocate for young people in your parish:

1. Start an intercessory prayer team. Gather adults together regularly to pray for the young people of the parish, the needs of young people, and for the youth ministry program.
2. If there is a parish council, be sure that you are on it, or somebody that understands youth ministry is on it. Work to change programs, policies, or procedures which create or play a part in the social problems that the young people face.
3. Train and empower young people to become fully involved in the parish. Set young people up for success by equipping them with resources, providing balanced guidance, and allowing them to have ownership of projects and programs. An empowered young person can accomplish more than they imagined possible.
4. Occasionally attend meetings of other groups in the parish, and challenge them on how they are including the young people in their activities.
5. Involve as many adults as possible in some aspect of your ministry. Include men and women, priests and sisters, single and married, from all age groups and nationalities.
6. Create a “Vision of Youth Ministry” for your parish, and make sure that everybody in the parish sees it and hears it. Bulletin inserts or letters to the parish work nicely to this effect.
7. Be an advocate for Parents. Design your programs to be family-based as often as possible.
8. Be an advocate for adult education in the parish. The better the adults and parents understand their faith, the more they will naturally share it with young people. Educate adults about what youth ministry is, and what it is not. Teach them to all be “youth ministers.” Encourage DRE’s, scout leaders, priests, coaches, and others to attend youth ministry training, conferences, etc...
9. Place a bulletin board in a prominent location in the Church to advertise the youth program.
10. Use language that reinforces these concepts. Never refer to the program as “your program.” Ask that your title be changed to “Coordinator (or Director) of Youth Ministry”.

In order to become a good advocate for young people you must first **understand** them. What social problems are they facing? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Who are they as individuals? You can then focus the parish program on what it is the young people are facing in their lives.

In this chapter you will find the following articles to help you to be a better advocate for young people:

1. **Surviving the Ride** by Kate Iadipaolo
2. **Advocating for Youth in Your Community** by Maria Calacan
3. **Creating Family Based Youth Ministry** by Jessica Morales
4. **Faith in Transition: The Pilgrimage of a Military Brat** by Mark Moitoza
5. **The Parish Priest** by Fr. Michael Taylor

The process of advocacy will require of you much faith and patience. Know that the work you partake in as you advocate is a work God has already begun in the hearts of the people He so loves.

Surviving the Ride: Understanding Adolescence

by Kate Iadipaolo

(In order to better advocate, one must better understand.)



This piece includes summary and excerpts of major points from a book by Rudolf Allers, M.D., Ph.D. entitled *Forming Character in Adolescents* which is available through Roman Catholic Books, Fort Collins, Colorado. Originally published in 1940, this book is addressed to parents and educators of young people. Allers received his MD in Austria, served with distinction at major European hospitals as psychiatrist and physician, was a member of the last class taught by Sigmund Freud (whose work Allers later debunked in *What's Wrong With Freud?*), received his doctorate in Philosophy, taught at Georgetown and the Catholic University of America, and also served the Church as a matrimonial advisor. This work is the fruit of his learning and experience—and though it was written years ago, contains timeless wisdom and fresh insights into the lives of adolescents.¹

Adolescence is a Time of Transition

The time of adolescence is a time of transition. A person, being in-between childhood and adulthood, must navigate through many changes. In order to understand adolescence, it makes sense to begin with the child's worldview: "The child takes himself for granted, as he takes the rest of reality."² A child unabashedly relies very much on others, and in cases where stability is the context of homelife, comes to feel a certain security. This security compensates for his as yet undeveloped objective and subjective senses.

The security of childhood seems to all but vanish as a young person enters adolescence. "[T]his situation changes, gradually or suddenly as the case may be, with the onset of adolescence... Accordingly, it is essentially a period of unrest and of uncertainty."³

Uncertainty is the Basic Feature of the Age of Adolescence.

The adolescent cannot 'take himself for granted' the way that he did as a child. "**The reliability of things and persons vanishes**, not because these things and persons have become different, but because the adolescent's relation to them changes. This change of relation is due to the change in the individual himself, or rather in the consciousness he has of himself."⁴

With so much uncertainty, it is difficult to predict what a day in the life of an adolescent will look like: "Things may become utterly different overnight. What was lovable to-day may be detestable to-morrow. Things which seemed devoid of all interest maybe enthralling the next

¹ N.B. While the author of the book, Rudolf Allers, acknowledges the vast differences between individuals, he speaks in a generalized way of the adolescent, offering a basic sketch in the hopes of assisting educators of young people. He refers to the adolescent as "he" for the sake of simplicity with no intention of excluding young ladies from the discussion.

² Rudolf Allers, *Forming Character in Adolescents* (Fort Collins, CO: Roman Catholic Books, 1940), p. 14.

³ Ibid, p. 15.

⁴ Ibid. Emphasis added.

day. Projects which were conceived enthusiastically may become stale and stupid within twenty-four hours.”⁵

There is a striving for independence throughout one’s life that becomes especially pronounced during adolescence. The very onset of adolescence urges a young person to rely on himself more than appealing to others in the way of a child. But relying on himself is difficult as this self seems to be “*ever-changing, ever-elusive, ever-mysterious.*”⁶

On the brink: “The adolescent mind, however, has to face **a world as yet unknown**, one in which he is precisely not at home, which is in a way strange and uncanny; and he has to face it while he is still ignorant of his own forces and capacities.”⁷

“The formation and solidification of the self is the very essence of the developmental processes during adolescence.”⁸

The changes which are undergone in adolescence are POSITIVE developments. As Allers reminds us: “It is indeed **necessary** that the infantile attitudes be replaced by such as are adequate to the **new stage of development.**”⁹

“With the slowly growing consciousness of being a self—absolutely distinct from every other self, **having to live its own life and to bear the whole responsibility for its being and doing**—the adolescent mind develops a natural reluctance to disclose itself.”¹⁰ This is the formation of that adult attribute of discretion, or right discernment of things to be told and things to be withheld. The teenager is learning to walk the middle path, but in the process sometimes tends toward one extreme or the other.

“Understanding means, in the most literal sense of the word, standing under another – that is, bearing his burden and taking his place, sharing therefore his point of view.”¹¹

An adolescent may be outspoken one day, reticent the next. “For this reason it is well to make use of every opportunity he offers us for becoming acquainted with him and his problems; it will not do, with adolescents, to postpone a discussion, because we never can be sure that to-morrow he will be as willing to confide and listen as he is to-day.”¹² This also underscores for educators of youth the importance of just spending time with young people, in order to be available for those moments of disclosure for which a mature and trusted adult is sought after.

It is also important to remember that some adolescent behaviors, especially those exaggerated behaviors, are due to an attempt to overcompensate for their basic uncertainty.¹³ Every issue a young person is dealing with is utterly real, even though to some adults they may seem transitory

⁵ Ibid, p. 18.

⁶ Ibid, p. 19.

⁷ Ibid, p. 28. Emphasis added.

⁸ Ibid, p. 19.

⁹ Ibid, p. 31. Emphasis added.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 33. Emphasis added.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 39.

¹² Ibid, p. 34.

¹³ Ibid, p. 41.

and trivial. “Changing though their ideas may be, young people are nevertheless **deadly in earnest** about them.”¹⁴ In order to know an adolescent, one must take his ideas and problems seriously.

Responding to the issues of adolescents: “It is, of course, quite right to tell the adolescent that his troubles are not unique in the sense he believes them to be; but this has to be said tactfully and with caution. Only after having got the youngster to feel that one understands him and is willing to listen and to advise, may one point out to him that all these troubles belong to human nature, that they have indeed a peculiar note, first with adolescents in general, secondly with him as an individual; that even adult life is not altogether free of them. But it would be a mistake to cut short his tale by stating that one has heard these very things already many times.”¹⁵

Adolescents have such a strong sense of the novelty of their experience and ideas that any remark made by an adult claiming to have had similar experience is taken “as a sure sign of a lack of understanding.”¹⁶ As the adolescent comes into his own, no longer can he subscribe to the old ideas, but he has not as yet replaced these ideas with others.

Relationship to Authority

“**The child** is not yet capable of understanding and of justifying... ideas rationally; he **relies on authority**. Authority, however, is one of the things that **adolescents** most resent. It is, strange enough, **at the same time one** of the things for which they long most.”¹⁷

The onset of this attitude toward authority is triggered by the fact that the adolescent “can no longer subscribe to the old ideas, nor can he definitely replace them by others. His mind is in a state of doubt and tossed from one extreme attitude into another. The inevitable result is that the adolescent assumes mainly **an attitude of denial**. Young people are often quick in rejecting views held by the older generation, but they are not capable of replacing these ideas with others.”¹⁸

“Authority **as such** does not impress youthful minds...”¹⁹ It is important to remind adolescents that they are to obey legitimate authority when appropriate, not simply because such an authority says so, but rather because they are most often bound to know better.

Against premature generalizations: It is important to seek the root of adolescent revolt in both general explanations and in each individual. The reasons why an individual adolescent revolts at all, and why he chooses one particular way of expressing his revolutionary attitude, must be ascertained by careful observation and reflection.²⁰

¹⁴Ibid, p. 43. Emphasis added.

¹⁵Ibid, p. 45.

¹⁶Ibid, p. 44.

¹⁷Ibid, p. 63-64. Emphasis added.

¹⁸Ibid, p. 62. Emphasis added.

¹⁹Ibid, p. 65. Emphasis added.

²⁰Cf. Allers, p. 67.

Inefficient authority is worse than none at all. **The face of authority:** Only authority which is accepted by the adolescent is helpful. Many adolescents (and adults) are more impressed by personality than position, therefore, “the authority of personalities is... generally greater than the authority of institutions.”²¹ The adolescent “has a desire for some visible, concrete, impressive power on which to rely; an institution, even if it is in a way admired and acknowledged, has not this capacity of immediately impressing the youthful mind. **The respect for and the acknowledgement of institutions depend, therefore, very much on the persons representing them and presenting them to adolescents.**”²²

A **brutal** assertion of authority is **never accepted** by the adolescent, and will probably stir up **revolt** in an adolescent. Below are two other possible ways to make authority acceptable to adolescents:

1) The reasonableness of laws based on natural truths is best **conveyed** by trusted persons to adolescents. This is a kind of authority established on the basis of **personal relations**. One must be aware of the many influences which can affect relationships, from emotional factors to accidental circumstance. The disturbance of these relationships may affect the adolescent’s stance toward authority.

2) Authority may become acceptable to an adolescent because its necessity and its true meaning are **approved by reason**. Reasons, once understood, become part of the personality and withstand the passing of time.

Additional Thoughts on the Proper Exercise of Authority:

- Avoid at all costs the **pretense of infallibility**. If you refuse to admit your error, then young people are discouraged to know that you are “not only liable to error, but also capable of insincerity”²³ Even when a young person recognizes that trusted adults make mistakes, something more valuable is gained. “The intellectual authority, if one may express it in this way, becomes less, but the moral authority grows.”²⁴
- Authority should not expect of others that which said authority is unwilling to do. Teenagers can spot a **hypocrite** a mile away! “There are, of course, many things permitted to adults which cannot be conceded to the child or the adolescent; but [adolescents] must know that these things will be accessible to them too after a certain time, and, in so far as possible, must be told why the adults may do or have this or that, while the younger generation is still denied the permission.”²⁵ Authority must **not be exaggerated** “so as to make it utterly disgusting to the adolescent, **nor may we dispense with it** and thereby fail to develop a true sense for authority and order.”²⁶ In dispensing with authority, the adult is placed on exactly the same level with the adolescent. By doing so, this adult “renounces every possibility of creating a real understanding of authority.”²⁷

²¹Ibid, p. 67.

²²Ibid, p. 67-68.

²³Ibid, p. 70.

²⁴Ibid, p. 71.

²⁵Ibid, p. 71.

²⁶Ibid, p. 72.

²⁷Ibid, p. 73.

Without such a real understanding of authority, the further development of the adolescent (in social life and work especially) is endangered.

Advocating for Adolescents

Support adolescents by asking them their views, and follow through by asking them to explain and prove their views. Adolescence is an important time to form good habits of the mind.

Encourage: There is hardly an adolescent who wouldn't report feeling discouraged by the thought that they never will overcome certain difficulties, never be able to realize certain ideals, etc. "Discouragement is the necessary consequence of uncertainty, especially uncertainty about the 'self'."²⁸ For precisely this reason, "Encouragement is something of which the adolescents are urgently in need."²⁹

When encouraging be sure to remember:

- To be effective, encouragement must apply to actual things worthy of such words.
- Adolescents are most encouraged by repeated small successes.
- Take the middle road: encouraging means challenging in addition to affirming.
- To avoid discouragement, "One ought... never to rebuke (the adolescent) for something wrong he has done, without letting him feel that one trusts in his capacity to behave differently."³⁰

Know the characteristics of adolescence as well as the characteristics of each individual's personality, their present situation and their past history. The educator's principle task is not to condemn but to understand the behavior of young people. A young person's various behaviors can be considered a problem, **or** "an opportunity for discovering the true nature of his pupil's mental make-up."³¹

→ **embarrassment:** "Embarrassment disappears when the person 'feels at home'; that is, when he feels that he is sufficiently appreciated."³² Exaggerated desires for making a good impression lead to a habit of embarrassment. This can be tempered by the realization that: we cannot always expect to make a good impression on everyone.

→ **instability of behavior:** springs from uncertainty about self, world, and destiny. The adolescent does not have full control over his instable behavior. "This behavior indeed springs from sources unknown to the individual and beyond his influence."³³

²⁸Ibid, p. 87.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid, p.89.

³¹Ibid, p. 91.

³²Ibid, p. 97.

³³Ibid, p. 102.

Education & Influence: *In one of his more lucid moments, Allers reminds of quite possibly **the most important** tenet to apply in the process of educating and influencing young people:*

“What a man has to learn, and what he is best taught while still a youngster, is that these (objective) laws, which are apparently outside of himself and forcing him to obedience, are in truth **the very laws of his own existence and his own personality**. They are not merely some strange powers one cannot help but obey, because otherwise they would destroy us; they are **the very basis of individual human existence**. The laws of reality are at the same time the laws of each individual, since the individual is part of this reality and not merely opposed to it. **Rebellion against these laws therefore undermines the individual’s very existence**. The idea that self-assertion necessarily involves opposition or rebellion must be combated. It is one of the most disastrous mistakes the human mind ever became guilty of, because it destroys the true conception of man’s place in the **totality of real being**.”³⁴ (!!!)

Instilling good habits of thought—The adolescent will readily concede that human society cannot persist without honesty and reliability prevailing in it. They are necessary for mankind and society to exist at all. During his adolescence, a young person will base his behavior much more on his subjective feelings (new and strange as they are) than to objective considerations. Though a young person may be brought to see the weight of objective considerations, also, it is something that must be taught before it becomes habit.

In practice: “Little is gained by simply telling the adolescent what he ought to do and how he ought to behave, because he knows this pretty well himself. **The important thing is to make him see, and if possible to discover for himself, why he does not do what in his own eyes is right**. The best way is to let him find out; we ought to make him explain why he acted just as he has done and does. He is sure to have quite a number of reasons for his behavior. By analyzing these reasons, he may be brought to understand that they are not as valid as he believed them to be.”³⁵ Consequences applied without explanation and understanding of the undesired behavior will do little to modify the behavior, much less offer opportunity for the young person’s growth. It will often amplify the young person’s revolt.

Along with encouragement should come an education in **persistence and patience**: “The adolescent must be shown that it is quite right to strive for a high and lofty goal, but that to realize such a goal demands the exercise of patience.”³⁶

In conclusion—“The point is, that in dealing with the adolescent, we have first of all to help him to some understanding of himself.”³⁷ The educator of young people should also expect to be educated along the way.

³⁴Ibid, p. 105.

³⁵Ibid, p. 106-107.

³⁶Ibid, p. 113.

³⁷Ibid, p. 106.

Advocating for Youth in Your Community

by Maria Calacan

Getting to know your community and the issues that are affecting youth and their families builds an environment of love, support and appreciation for diversity that testifies to the love of Jesus Christ. The building of relationships inside and outside your parish community assists the Coordinator of Youth Ministry (CYM) in understanding where your young people come from, what is the root of their struggles, and what sets them on fire with the love of Christ so you can encourage them to be faithful.

For example, in 2008 there was an issue with the County of Fairfax closing the Support on Suspension program in the Culmore area. During school suspension, parents struggle to find youth a safe, supervised program where they are able to keep up with their schoolwork and where they are prepared to resume their studies (FPY-SOS White Paper). Partners got together to organize fundraising efforts and created relationships with Fairfax County Partnership for Youth, businesses, faith based and non faith based community organizations. St. Anthony Parish allowed Rotary Club to sell raffle tickets after Masses, the Imam of the local Mosque contacted local business owners for donations and the community partners pulled together for the community's youth to keep the program afloat for the 2008-2009 school year.

While working with community partners, I learned that the graduation rate for Hispanic and African American youth in Fairfax County, VA was dramatically lower than that of Anglo students, specifically in the Culmore area high schools and middle schools (FPY SOS – White Paper). Many parish youth have already participated in the program and now are leaders advocating for the program. A youth minister understands and walks with young people by meeting them in their various life situations (*Renewing the Vision*) and looks for all resources inside and outside the parish to support the families. A CYM also receives requests from parents asking for a letter of recommendation to present to the public school boards. This is a prime example of meeting and supporting a young person and their family during a difficult life situation, especially when there may be a linguistic or cultural barrier. It is difficult to reach out to families and youth when they are lacking knowledge of processes and possible solutions, in this example specifically suspension/expulsion from a public school.

Thinking outside of the box and being part of the resolution is simple. Be open to learning, communicating, and not ignoring the injustices of society, specifically those that deal with families and youth. Another example is that the county sends information out before summer break to all communities requesting them to be a “host” for summer meal programs for county youth. Perhaps the community parish is not able to host the program but is able to communicate to families so youth are able to have a meal or two during the weekdays. Hosts in Fairfax County include faith based organizations, community centers and schools.

Those who minister to youth know that the transition of middle school to high school and beyond is stressful. It is hard to give testimony and preach that everything is possible with the help of Jesus when youth experience many doors closing for them and their dreams seem almost impossible. Young people are caught between finding the right path and following the easier path. Youth overcome obstacles like learning English and adapting to another culture, and they

are in search of a better life. They serve the community through various ministries at church and through school programs that help other young people understand the importance of reading and writing in their native language. A youth worker walks with these youth to help them see these challenges as blessings and encourages them to persevere academically and faithfully recognize that these gifts will help them succeed. Through their testimony of faith, young leaders in the community and parish are developed and they encourage all young people who find themselves frustrated and sometimes alone in their struggle.

A young person was admitted to a University, went to freshman orientation and was sent back home hundreds of miles away upon trying to register because of their legal status. This is a very sensitive subject that many see as political but as a Church, we need to stand up for adolescents, especially those who are voiceless and powerless in society (*Renewing the Vision*). Basic needs for youth are to have a safe home environment, get an education and a meal at least once each day. CYMs need to be reminded that this is not a third world country that is suffering from these issues. These are our youth sitting in the pews at our Masses that may look and talk a little different, but were made in the image of God. We may unknowingly be already walking with these young people, but because they are embarrassed or have some fears of being rejected, they have not shared these struggles.

How to advocate in your community

Know your community by building relationships with the representatives of community faith based organizations, county programs for families, schools, and diocesan youth specific organizations. The Catholic Diocese of Arlington is blessed with a diverse population that enriches our Catholic Church. There are many languages and faces but still the same spirit. It's important to remember that and to have a kind presence and open heart toward those of other cultures.

Youth workers should learn what resources are available for families and young people and work together for a common goal. For example, I participate in the Culmore Partners meetings that are held monthly and I am a part of the planning committee for the Community Day, an event where young people of the parish are able to show off their wonderful talents and learn about various community services. Participating in county and community dialogues builds a network of people looking for and advocating for the issues of the community at large. Inviting older youth to participate is important, as they can become advocates for the issues that they are living. This gives them hope and keeps them focused on the right path by letting them know they are not alone in the struggle.

Maria Calacan is the Coordinator of Youth Ministry at Saint Anthony Catholic Church in Falls Church, VA. She was a part of the success for the Support on Suspension in the Culmore area where some of her students live. She has a heart for social justice and service.

Creating Family Based Youth Ministry

by Jessica Morales

Why do we desire “Family Based” Youth Ministry? If we convert teens, but their parents do not support it, or understand their faith, then the teens will fall right back to where they were. Family based youth ministry empowers parents. It includes the entire family in all aspects of church life including community, sacraments, catechesis and evangelization. There are as many models that will work as there are parishes in our diocese.

Having a family based youth ministry requires support and participation from the Director of Religious Education (DRE), Coordinator of Youth Ministry (CYM), Pastor, music director, and all other parish staff. It requires a commitment from the entire parish community. Components of family ministry can be integrated by CYMs if not fully supported by the whole parish; but positioning the ministry as an essential base for parish growth provides the foundation of support crucial for a thriving family based youth ministry.

Renewing the Vision states, “We also have learned that no one strategy, activity, or program is adequate to the task of promoting the three goals for ministry with adolescents and that families, parishes, and schools cannot work in isolation if the Church is to realize its goals.” Comprehensive youth ministry “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 this ministry” (RTV 19).

One model that has recently emerged is an intergenerational catechesis program. In an intergenerational catechesis program, families gather once a month as a whole community to share a meal and to discuss a topic. Each year there is a global theme, such as “The Creed” or “Prayer”; and each month there is a more specific subtopic such as “We Believe in One Baptism for the Forgiveness of Sins” or “The Rosary”.

At the monthly gathering families are afforded the opportunity to share time together at a meal - one they do not have to prepare - and spend time together learning about the specific topic. Together the community celebrates the birthdays and sacraments of those in attendance. Families will oftentimes split into age-specific groups to learn age-appropriate material. Finally, the families gather together to recap what each subset has learned and to conclude in a closing prayer.

Each family is given a take-home kit that they can work on together at home during the month to continue family discussion. With each family having the necessary materials, they are empowered to use these materials to grow in understanding of a specific topic. The materials in these kits can be adapted for differing ages and learning styles.



Family based youth ministry continues beyond the intergenerational catechesis. Families are encouraged to work together in other aspects of church community life. For example, a family might distribute donuts after Sunday Mass or join the church choir so they can sing together. Another family perhaps will donate their time to serve a meal at a homeless shelter. Each family member truly benefits in this shared giving.

Mark DeVries, former youth minister and author of the book *Family-Based Youth Ministry* explains that “the contemporary crisis in youth ministry has little to do with programming and everything to do with families. Our culture has put an incredible emotional weight on the shoulders of the nuclear family, a weight that [he believes] God never intended for families to bear alone.” There should be what DeVries calls a “strategic priority of undergirding nuclear families with the rich support of the extended Christian family of the church.” He concludes, “When these two formative families work in concert, we are most likely to see youth growing into a faith that lasts for the long haul.”



The following is a partial list of programs/ideas that would be family-based:

- **Worship** – pray together/stay together
 - Lectors
 - Ushers
 - Choir
 - Religious education teacher (adult) and aides (teen)
 - Greeters
- **Mission and Service** – work along side one another
 - WorkCamp
 - Vacation Bible school
 - Soup kitchen
 - Food / care package for the homeless
 - International mission trips
 - Adopt a grandparent
 - Sort food at local food pantry
 - Weekend family mission trips
 - Meals on Wheels
- **Education** – learn more about one another
 - Parent/teenager course on drugs and alcohol
 - Parent/teenager course on communication
 - Parent/teenager course on “Building Faith in Your Family”
 - Movie night
 - Support group for teenagers from divorced families / blended families
 - Lenten/Advent devotionals written by the parents or the teens

- Parent/teenager book club
- **Recreation** – have fun with one another
 - Any parent/teenager competition
 - Volleyball
 - Hayride
 - Picnic
 - Board game night
- **Miscellaneous Ideas-**
 - Parents’ bulletin or newsletter
 - Taking parents to lunch
 - Parents’ roundtable
 - Birthday / Baptismal cards sent to parents and teenagers

Parish leadership, staff, and parents need to integrate youth participation into its core values, and empower families to work with young people. When we reach across generational lines and fill the gaps with memories and stories of parish community life together, then we can truly achieve the community needed for the youth of the parish to survive and thrive!

Jessica Morales is the Coordinator of Youth Ministry at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Manassas, VA. She is married and has two children. She loves working with young people, sharing her faith with those around her and playing indoor soccer in her spare time.

Faith in Transition: The Pilgrimage of a Military Brat

by Mark Moitoza

One of the most recognizable constants for military-connected Catholic youth is that within two or three years their family is going to move. Experiencing faith in transition is both a gift and a challenge, much like the experience of a pilgrimage. Each year the Diocese of Arlington deals with these transitions as military-connected families depart for a new assignment and others enter in as strangers in well established communities. Recognizing the pastoral needs of military-connected youth and their families can go a long way to encouraging the more important constants in their lives of transition: faith and family. The presence of military brats can also be an asset for youth ministry programs in your parish.

First a word about brats! The term *military brat* may appear to have negative connotations. The acronym *brat* has many different meanings depending on the source. An earlier version finds that the British Army used it to define a British Regiment Attached Traveler. In other words, a brat is someone traveling with the person in uniform. More recent positive versions include Born, Raised, And Transferred as well as Brave, Resilient, Adaptable, and Trustworthy. The term *military brat* is most commonly accepted as a term of endearment rather than a slight. Current publications tend to use the term *military-connected* since the child or young person is not in the military but rather connected to it due to their parent(s) profession.

A parish community is strengthened over time as it builds an identity and develops traditions in response to the Gospel message of discipleship. The parish is a place to belong to that has a shared history. For military brats, however, their faith is a combination of multiple experiences that contribute to the whole. For example, it is normal to ask someone where they are from or what parish they belong to. Asking a military brat these questions, however, pose challenges. Sometimes military brats will say they are “from everywhere” or from the place where they currently reside or they may just say “my parents are in the military.” There is not necessarily a place where they are from because they have not been anywhere long enough to identify it as their home. The Catholic faith becomes their home in multiple places and positive experiences of youth ministry programs can enable them to identify that.

The three goals of the U.S. Bishops’ 1997 document, *Renewing the Vision*, state what it means 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 9). To empower, to draw, and to foster a comprehensive approach of youth ministry means that parish programs must take into account the experiences and needs of those trusted to their care. For the military brat a sense of welcome and recognition of their presence go a long way toward fostering their pilgrimage of faith. The military term for this ritual is “hail and farewell.” Unfortunately, it is a tradition extended only to the family member in uniform. Typically, military units have the opportunity at commander-led gatherings to thank the person moving and to recognize the contributions they made. These gatherings also serve as an opportunity to welcome the new person moving into the assignment.

One way to respond to and to involve military brats in parish youth ministry programs is to develop an outreach that seeks to welcome military brats. The Coordinator of Youth Ministry

might develop an outreach team that involves a good number of key leaders in the parish to be on the lookout for new families that visit and/or register in the parish. Reaching out to the newcomer becomes a ministry of hospitality. In doing so, the military brat may be introduced to the particular youth ministry programs available. Take the time to listen to their experiences and learn how they were involved in their previous parish or military Catholic Faith Community. Military brats are flexible and adaptable. They have the ability to blend in to new cultural settings. Sometimes they blend in so well that they are not recognized. Avoid the trap of not encouraging their involvement since they will only be around for a short time. Their ideas and their leadership bring gifts from other communities that will contribute much to your programs.

Often it seems that parishes are just getting to know a family and it is time for them to move on to the next assignment. Make the effort to say goodbye well. Military brats can surf the culture by just surviving one assignment to the next. Before the young person departs have a farewell gathering and prayer. Encourage young people in the parish to recall a memory of the person departing. It could be a program they participated in or led, a way that their gifts helped the parish to grow. It could be as simple as “you often made me laugh.” Give the departing military brat the opportunity to recall memories of the people gathered as well. In doing so you help military brats to realize that their presence mattered. Even though they move frequently the presence of Christ is recognized and shared in the Eucharist and in the lived experiences of the faithful. These simple recognitions of entering in and departing community can be touchstones for the pilgrimage of faith that military brats experience.

Finally, it is appropriate to end with a note on deployment. All military brats have been affected by the reality of deployment. If their parent has not been deployed they will likely know someone who has. When military brats struggle with issues of deployment it is good to have a list of competent resources in your community for referral. Sometimes just matching a military brat with another military brat dealing with deployment is helpful. Other times more professional referrals are appropriate. The Military Child Education Coalition has a resource training called *Living in the New Normal: Supporting Children with Trauma and Loss* which offers multiple ways to support military-connected youth and families. In addition, the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA Office of Evangelization offers online resources to support Catholic military brats and their families, <http://www.milarch.org>.

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The Parish Priest and Youth Ministry

by Fr. Michael Taylor

“Oh! How great is the priest. The priest will only be understood in heaven. Were he understood on earth, people would die, not of fear, but of love.”

-St. John Marie Vianney

The youth minister in a parish has a unique opportunity to touch our two great families: our human family and the family of the Church. The youth minister cooperates with parents who have given life to their child and brought them into God’s family through Baptism, and with priests who, cooperating with the bishop, are asked (along with the parents) to guide the youth to eternal life. Working with priests, the dispensers of our great sacramental means to salvation, should be an essential goal for the youth minister. ***The following are some suggestions on how to better involve your parish priest(s):***

Invite your priest to all of your events.

- *Continue* to invite even if your priest cannot attend for a while (priests really do like skiing, paintball, pizza and Orioles’ games!)
- Extend your invitation to *different priests in the parish*
- *Be specific* in your invitation, i.e. not just “when you get a chance” but inviting “for this event at this time” will bring about better results
- *Introduce and welcome* the priest to your meeting/event
- *Ask the priest to take part in your meeting. He could be involved by:*
 - o *Giving talks* on a variety of subjects: saints, sacraments, a tour of the church, the history of a particular devotion (this can be greatly aided by visual images and holy cards), etc.--just open up your *Catechism of the Catholic Church* if you ever run out of ideas!
 - o Providing responses to young people’s questions in a *Q & A* session (you could give students a chance to ask questions out loud or write down questions anonymously and hand them in).

Plan your calendar and then *review* it with your parish priest(s).

- This will give you an opportunity *to know* your parish priest better and for him to be involved directly in the youth activities
- He may have *other ideas* such as Advent/Lenten days of prayer or confessions services, a spiritual beginning such as a Mass or blessing before an outing, ideas to involve youth in praying for one another, their families, parish and world, Exposition & Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, a pilgrimage to a church with particular historical meaning or beauty, ideas for a guest speaker, etc.
- *Give a final copy* of the schedule to all of your priests

Father Taylor is a graduate of Mount St Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, MD. He formerly served as Spiritual Director for the Office of Youth Ministry and as Chaplain at Bishop O'Connell High School in Arlington. He has served as a priest at St John the Apostle, Leesburg; St John the Evangelist, Warrenton; and St Bernadette, Springfield, St James in Falls Church and as the Pastor at St. Patrick Church in Fredericksburg.