



12 Steps to “Get Started”

by Paul Bevins

- 1. Know the mission.** Why do the parish youth programs exist? This should be simple, but many parish Coordinators of Youth Ministry (CYMs) may not be able to articulate their simple core mission. Begin by identifying the ministry’s mission statement. Make it concise. Make it easy to remember so that you can refer back to it as you progress in ministry. It should have something to do with leading young people to Christ! Review this mission annually. Do not be afraid to revise it as the program evolves, but do not do this more than once a year. Commit to it. A clear, concise mission should simplify decision-making.
Example mission statement: *Empowering high school aged youth to trust, love and serve God by incorporating Church teaching and tradition into a Catholic WAY of life.*
- 2. Know your pastor.** This may seem like a no-brainer, but an easy mistake that many new CYMs make is neglecting to get to know their boss. In your first month, go to lunch with your pastor, preferably offsite, and talk about goals and share ideas. Be sure that he understands what your approach to ministry will be. Try to make lunch a regular occurrence, perhaps once per month but not less than once a semester. Keep him informed regularly – perhaps by email – of what is going on in the youth ministry program. Invite him and the other parish priests to meetings with young people often, at least once a month. It is important for the young people to get to know their priests, too.
- 3. Start small.** Most new CYMs have been exposed to youth ministry in some way, often as a volunteer or a young person that “graduated” from an established, vibrant, and fruitful ministry program. They often begin their career with an expectation that a similar large ministry can be achieved overnight. But you must be patient. Build the program slowly.
- 4. Get to know key personnel** in other ministries: the young adult groups, RCIA, the mentor couples, Atrium, the custodian, the finance committee chairman. Determine ways in which they can be involved in the program – empower them. Do not forget that the Diocesan Office of Youth Ministry is here to support you as well!
- 5. Advertise.** “Get the word out” in as many ways, in as many places as possible:
 - Pulpit announcements are a great way for people to see your face.
 - Greet the congregation outside after Mass to answer questions and collect contact information for potential volunteers. Greet young people and introduce yourself. Do this at every Mass two weekends in the early Fall and follow-up a few times throughout the year, at least twice per semester.
 - Old-fashioned signs around the parish work, too.
 - Online resources reach young people well. Build your email list. Safely use Facebook, Twitter and other online communities to support the program.
 - A weekly blurb in the bulletin is also a nice reminder to the parish about what you are doing or have just done.
 - With permission, visit the schools and athletic fields in your parish.
- 6. Build a core team.** Remember that youth ministry cannot be done well by one person! Again, it is not about you... so start placing key volunteers around you soon after you have arrived. The initial team does not have to be huge, as long as you have a few other people to rely on and for the young people to relate to. Set expectations early: explain to them what the program goals are; ensure that they “buy-in” to the mission. It is wise to set up a standard “application” process through which all volunteers must pass to become a part of the team;

run this by your pastor. It is important that both you and the volunteers continually recall that you are all working toward the same goal – you all have the same mission, you there to bring young people to Christ. Lastly, if things are not working out, do not be afraid to let a volunteer go.

7. **Solicit feedback.** Talk to those that have been around for a while – those listed in step 3 above and others – they have a wealth of knowledge about what has worked in the past, what has not... and why! But do not allow this feedback to limit you... allow it to inform you as you begin the program. If your parish has an established team of volunteers already in place, be sure to meet with them as soon as possible. Talk to them about the previous program and offer them a continued opportunity to “buy-in” to the program. And once you begin meeting with the young people, talk to them – they have great ideas, too!
8. **Kick-off well and with notice.** Early Fall works best, but be sure to complete the previous steps to set yourself up for the best chance at success. Advertise well and be sure to enlist the support of parents and other volunteers. Invite the pastor and other parish priests. Food, games, music and icebreakers – means for establishing relationships – should be the focus on this night: do not worry about diving into heavy Catechesis on the first night!
9. **Get to know the young people.** Each time you meet with the young people make it a personal goal to know their names. Be aware of when new teens arrive and make an extra effort to bring them “into the fold” without singling them out. Utilize your volunteer team to create small groups as soon as is practical. Employ the 1x3x5 Challenge (shown in Chapter 5 of this manual) as a practical means to consistently touch base with the young people.
10. **Get to know the parents.** Relationships with the young people’s families are as important to develop as those with the young people themselves! Remember this as you build the program: *the parents are the primary catechist in the young peoples’ lives*, not you. If the young people miraculously find the time to come to a few hours of ministry events each week but their parents are telling them that “it is just an activity, something for the résumé”, you may soon lose the young person. But remember that the parents are not your enemy! *Work with* them by informing them about what topic you will be talking about. *Empower* parents by providing them with follow-up discussion questions for the dinner table (email is great for this; if you meet on Sunday night, send this follow-up email on Monday morning). *Engage* them by setting up parent-specific meetings and events. Remember that the parents are not only your partner in ministry, one to which you are playing a subordinate role, but they can also be a valuable source for knowledge, volunteers and parish support.
11. **Peter-Barnabas-Timothy.** St. Paul had three important “earthly” relationships... all of which were essential to him continuing and succeeding in his ministry. After God, Paul had his spiritual advisor in St. Peter, his colleague/friend/confidant/buddy in St. Barnabas, and his student in St. Timothy. Youth workers would benefit by following this model set for us by Paul. Finding a “Timothy” is simple; he can be found in every one of the young people in the parish ministry program. But you must also ensure that you are consistently and continually working on your own spiritual growth by identifying and prioritizing your relationship with a spiritual director, your “Peter”. Lastly, it would also serve you well to identify your “Barnabas”, another CYM (preferably one here in the Diocese of Arlington that you can get together with regularly and share experiences with). This relationship will assist you and them as you continue your walk and grow in ministry together.
12. **Pray.** Again, be consistent in your own spiritual life. You must take time to refill to continue to be able to pour out.