

The 1x3x5 Challenge

by Jim Beckman

The *Renewing the Vision* document by the US Bishops is referred to as “a blueprint for the continued development of effective ministry with young and older adolescents.” Within the document, the driving goals of youth ministry are clearly established: (1) To empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today, (2) To draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission, and work of the Catholic faith community, and (3) To foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person.¹

When you reflect on these daunting goals, you quickly come to the conclusion that the only way you can hope to achieve them is if you have “relationships” with the young people you work with. Without a relationship, and even more important, the foundation of any good relationship, “trust”, you cannot possibly hope to make any progress towards these goals. A trusting relationship is essential.

Indeed, building healthy, trusting relationships with young people is at the heart of any effective youth ministry. Yet youth ministry efforts can sometimes become so focused on programming and activities that they miss the deeper connections of relationship for which young people hunger. Teens are looking more for models and witnesses than they are teachers. As Pope Paul VI said in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, “Modern man listens more readily to witnesses than to teachers, and if they listen to teachers it is because they are witnesses.”² And the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* further emphasizes this need: “In order that the message of salvation can show the power of its truth and radiance before men, it must be authenticated by the witness of life of Christians. The witness of a Christian life and good works, done in a supernatural spirit, have great power to draw men to the faith and to God.”³

The challenge becomes building the relationships – literally creating ministry-connecting points that foster an ever-deepening relationship of trust with a young person. Over the years, I have struggled with consistently making these relational connections happen, and have struggled even more helping make them happen with volunteers. It can be a somewhat intangible thing to say to a group of volunteers, “Go and build relationships with the teens!” - even if that is a heart-felt desire among many of your volunteers.

The “1x3x5 Challenge” was developed to address this and to help volunteers by providing a tangible, practical goal for weekly relational contact with teens. The idea basically flows from the primary ways that we, as adults, can make “contact” with the young people we minister to: in person or “face-to-face”, by phone, and in writing. All three can be effective, yet personal, face-to-face contact will always do the most to help grow a relationship. Yet, a phone call, though not as effective as a face-to-face connection, is probably more effective than a written note.

¹ *Renewing the Vision*, USCCB

² *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paragraph 41

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Paragraph 2044

The “1x3x5 Challenge” was created to serve as a weekly tool for volunteers. It challenged them to set up one face-to-face or personal contact during the next week, three phone calls they would make to young people during the next week, and five notes they would send. The numbers can be adjusted if these goals are unrealistic for volunteers; for example, make it a “1x2x3 Challenge”. The point is to get volunteers consistently making relational contact with teens, and the challenge serves as a practical way to hold them accountable to this.

One practical way to use the “1x3x5 Challenge” is to have volunteers send in a picture of their challenge sheet each week after they have filled it in with names of the teens they will be making contact with. This allows the Director of Youth Ministry to keep track of which teens are being connected with, and even to make sure there isn’t any accidental imbalance occurring with particular teens.



Here are a few other practical tips for implementation:

- Make sure that volunteers have the necessary information they will need readily available: addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, birthdates, etc.
- Provide clear training on the guidelines about your diocesan safe-environment policies in regards to this type of relational ministry, and hold your volunteers accountable to the standards.
- Encourage written notes to be sent via “snail-mail” rather than email or text. There’s actually a new phenomenon for young people around receiving an actual letter in the mailbox– it’s much more exciting than an email or text which they receive all the time.
- Accommodate volunteers with postcards, birthday cards, stationery, etc. to make the task even easier (*Many of my volunteers would frequently stay after for 10-15 minutes on a night we had just met with teens to write their five notes and leave them with me to mail – which saved them all the postage!*)

“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good News!’” (*Romans 10:13-15*)



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WEEKLY CONTACT MINISTRY CHALLENGE

1X3X5

1 Teen you are going to get together with:

Name:	Where?:	When?:	Notes:

3 Teens you are going to make a phone call to:

Name:	Calling For?:	Date:	Notes:

5 Teens you are going to write a note to: *(b-day card, encouraging word, etc.):*

Name:	Writing For?:	Date:	Notes:

CORE Team Member's Name: _____ Week of: _____