

## Structuring an Effective Core Team

by Rob Tessier

A youth ministry Core Team is a group of volunteers who plan, prepare, and execute the main teen gathering at the parish. This gathering is frequently on Sunday nights, but it may take place a different night of the week as well. The idea behind having a “main weekly meeting” is to provide an opportunity to bring in a large number of teens for catechesis, community building, service, and social activities whereby they then go out to participate in their faith life within the parish or other youth ministry groupings.

This article is based on developing a Core Team intended to minister to a Sunday night program that serves the purpose of meeting the catechetical needs of the high school teens along with creating a fun environment where they can engage in community building, spirituality, service, and even leadership. A Core Team can be comprised of four different types of people, including:

1. Young adults - These are volunteers who are either single or newly married that don't have any connection to the teens in the ministry other than the desire to help young people fall more in love with Jesus. It is good if the Core Team is comprised of about 35-50% young adults.
2. Parents - These are volunteers who are identified as being great in working with all the youth, but happen to also have their own child in the youth ministry. Having a 5-15% of the Core Team made up of parents can be healthy.
3. Clergy/Consecrated - This could include the priest assigned to youth ministry in the parish, a consecrated member of a religious community, or a deacon. It is a beautiful gift if the Core Team can be comprised of at least 5-15% clergy or consecrated.
4. Teen leaders - These are generally junior and senior teens who have demonstrated qualities of leadership and the desire to be a peer leader. Teens strong in their faith and committed to their peers should represent 35-50% of the Core Team.

The four different types of people each bring a wonderful charism to a team.

Young adults generally have a lot of time and energy to pour into creating exciting activities. In addition, while they are adults, they are closer in age to the teens, providing a solid role model for teens to look to as examples. Parents can provide wisdom and understanding of teens' lives that younger adults don't have. Solid parent leaders also offer a great example to teens of fatherhood, motherhood, and family life. Clergy and consecrated members can bring the group greater spiritual insight and theological understanding, especially when dealing with more difficult subjects. The teens are further inspired by their lifetime commitment to the Church. Teen leaders are vital in assisting with the execution of the activities. A teen perspective can really help planning teams make good decisions on how to most effectively present an activity.

In addition, a witness talk given by a teen is a powerful tool to open the other teens up to opportunities for conversion.

The size of a Core Team should roughly reflect 25% of the size of the youth program. For example, five Core Team members serving a group of twenty teens is good, or ten members for forty teens, or twenty members for eighty teens. The Core Team, if possible, should be split into smaller units called “Planning Teams”. If the Core Team is comprised of six adults and six teens, then consider having three planning teams with two adults and two teens assigned to each. In this situation, a planning team would be responsible for planning every third Sunday night. The entire

Core Team would be needed at every Sunday night to support the plan of the group that is leading; however, the burden of design and preparation only falls on teams periodically instead of weekly. If a Core Team is large enough to have four planning teams, this affords the opportunity to only have to plan for one night each month.

Core Teams need to meet outside of the youth gatherings at least once per month (possibly twice per month) to plan upcoming meetings. These Core Team meetings ideally will take place at a consistent time and place. For example, the Core Team could meet the first Wednesday of every month from 7:00-9:00pm in the Youth Room with pizza provided; this consistency helps it stick in members' minds and calendars. It is required that everyone attend. The first forty-five minutes consists of eating & socializing, praying as a group, and having a brief meeting that involves looking at the schedule and taking an opportunity for some formation. The second part of the meeting is a chance to gather into planning teams for the purpose of planning upcoming nights. The Director of Youth Ministry (DYM) should not be on a planning team. The DYM should move around and visit with each planning team in an attempt to offer support, input, and ideas. Each planning team should have a coordinator who is responsible for recording the outline of the plan and tracking who has taken charge of various details for the night. The outline of the night should be sent to the DYM a week before the meeting they planned.

Core Teams should also be spiritually fed and formed. The beginning of each semester is a good time to schedule a five- to six-hour meeting on a Saturday or Sunday that delves into opportunities for prayer and spirituality in addition to presenting formation to help the team members grow in faith and leadership. These are also good opportunities to present the theme for the semester and ideas or resources for each week of the semester.

DYMs should be careful not to simply distribute topics to planning teams without a source of support. Include church documents, books, or other resources to support the teaching points for that topic. Topics should follow a progressive theme/syllabus. The U.S. Bishops' document on doctrinal elements for youth catechesis ([Adaptation of Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age – For Use in Parish and Youth Ministry Programs](#)) should be used to develop your curriculum. There are other organizations and publishers that provide sample youth ministry programs.

In closing, it is not recommended for a DYM to try and be his or her own Core Team. Part of the job of a DYM is to develop other strong volunteer leaders who can then be more branches for the ministry that help to reach out and grow the ministry to youth within the parish.

*Rob Tessier has been a Director of Youth Ministry in the Diocese of Arlington for 23 years and has been serving at All Saints Parish since 2001 while also serving as Middle School Religion and Theatre Teacher at All Saints Catholic School. Additionally, Rob is founder/director of both Upper Room Theatre Ministry and Spotlight on the Arts Summer Camps which both bring the arts alive within a Catholic setting for youth. Currently a graduate student in the Masters of Catechesis and Evangelization program through Franciscan University of Steubenville, Rob's first degrees are in Speech Communication and Theatre from Miami University. After undergraduate studies, in 1996 Rob was trained by the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Clown College followed by a professional tour with the Greatest Show on Earth as one of its clowns. A calling to ministry within the Church led Rob back home to full time Youth Ministry and a deeper participation into the Youth Apostles Institute based out of McLean, VA. Married shortly thereafter, Rob and Carole now have 9 children between the ages of 6 - 21, live on a small farm, and perform as the Tessier Family Singers to area nursing homes.*