

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.

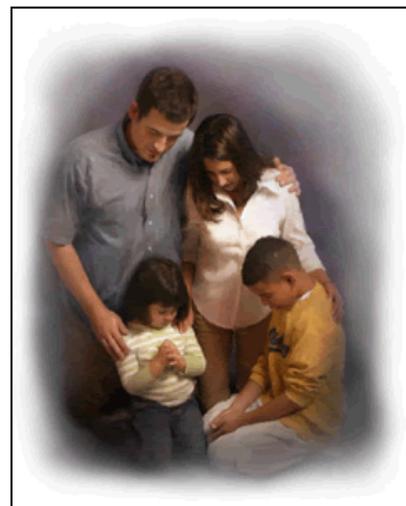
Having a family based youth ministry requires support and participation from the Director of Religious Education (DRE), Coordinator of Youth Ministry (CYM), Pastor, music director, and all other parish staff. It requires a commitment from the entire parish community. Components of family ministry can 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.