

Youth Ministry Welcome Packet

Catholic Youth Apostolate Mission Statement

- The Mission of the Catholic Youth Apostolate is to help all young people hear the Gospel message of Jesus Christ and to help these young people actively respond to the Gospel and enthusiastically participate in the mission of Jesus Christ and His Church.

Mission for the Office of Youth Ministry

- As Catholic clergy, and laypersons we seek to fulfill the goal of the Archdiocese of St. Louis to strengthen youth ministry under the leadership and vision of the Archbishop of St. Louis. Through support to parishes, event and program planning, direct ministry with teens and collaboration with other offices, institutions and the community we seek to empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today, to draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission and work of the Church, and to foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person.

How we can accomplish this mission in your Parish

- *“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.” – Acts 2:42*
- In other words, this means we need to have youth programs that are Faithful to Jesus Christ and His Church, share in the Eucharist together, Teach/Catechize our Catholic Faith, pray together, participate in the Sacraments, and have time to socialize/play as a community.
- We Need To Invest In Our Youth – Time, Talent, and Treasure. The more we put in the more we will get out! If we give little, then little will happen.
- In the words of Our Holy Father:

“This is what is needed: a Church for young people, which will know how to speak to their heart and enkindle, comfort, and inspire enthusiasm in it with the joy of the Gospel and the strength of the Eucharist; a Church which will know how to invite and welcome the person who seeks a purpose for which to commit his whole existence; a Church which is not afraid to require much, after having given much; which does not fear asking from young people the effort of a noble and authentic adventure, such as that of the following of the Gospel.”

(Pope John Paul II. 1995 World Day of Prayer for Vocations.)

“Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”

(Pope Benedict XVI)

“Catholic youth ministry is the response of the faith community to the needs and gifts of young people. Catholic Youth Ministry calls young people to be disciples of Jesus, fosters their responsible participation in the life and mission of the faith community and fosters their personal and spiritual growth”.
(“Common Goals for Ministry”, National Certification Standards for Catholic Youth Ministers pg.9, 2005.)

Questions to ask before starting a youth ministry program:

What age group will you target?

- High School?
- Middle School?
- Grade School?

**Two or Three years can make a big difference in the maturity, understanding, and culture of youth.*

Who will coordinate the youth program?

- Paid Full-Time Youth Minister?
- Paid Part-Time Youth Minister?

- Volunteer Youth Minister?
- Volunteer Youth Team?

**Consistent leadership will create consistent events, coordination, order, accountability and better relational ministry.*

Do you have volunteers that can assist the youth minister as an Adult Youth Leader/ Core Team Member?

- These people should be older than the teens.
- Each Adult leader must have a background check, signed the safe environment policies, and attended a Protecting God's Children workshop.

**A good team makes for a good youth program. Having access to different gifts, talents, personalities, and faith journeys allow you to share the gospel to a variety of different youth and show that Our Church and Jesus are for everyone!*

Where will you hold your youth meetings?

- It is important to have consistency to where you meet. This makes it easier for teens to know where to go for regular meetings.

How often will you meet with the teens/youth?

- Twice a week?
- Once a week?
- Once a month?
- Every other month?

**As stated above, being consistent makes it easier for teens to remember when you meet and it also allows you to build Christian relationships that they can count on. If we don't teach teens to stay active in their faith, then they will not learn how to make prayer a part of their life style.*

How often will you meet with the Adult Youth Leaders to plan and go over future meetings with teens?

- Once a week?
- Once a month?
- Every other month?

**It is important to have time to meet with your Adult Leaders so you can be prepared for your youth meetings. Adult leaders may also need to be educated on topics before you present them to the youth. Remember that everyone has a different faith journey and we need to lead our volunteers, just as we need to lead our youth. The more prepared, confident, and sincere you are as a team, the more the youth will appreciate what you have prepared and also take it to heart.*

Do you have a budget for resources?

- If "No", the bare essentials are a Catholic Bible, a Catechism of the Catholic Church, and a YOUCAT.
 - May borrow resources from the CYA library.
- If "Yes", there are catholic programs out there to help you develop youth nights, retreats, meetings, socials, etc. in addition to the bare essentials listed above.

Catholic Program Resources:

LIFE TEEN: <http://catholicyouthministry.com> and www.lifeteen.com

- Life Teen is an international Catholic movement that serves the Church by providing resources and faith experiences that help lead teens closer to Christ. This is accomplished through a vibrant Eucharistic spirituality and by creating widespread opportunities for teens to grow in their faith.
- They have programs for high school and middle school.
- Even if you don't subscribe, they also offer free youth minister resources.
- Contact information:
 - 2222 S. Dobson Suite 601, Mesa, AZ 85202
 - Phone: 1-800-809-3902

YM CENTRAL: <http://www.ymcentral.com>

- Crossroads Four Year Youth Ministry Curriculum
- Contact Information:
 - YM Central, 1928 E. Highland F-104 #444, Phoenix, AZ 85016-4626
 - Phone: 602-400-5708
 - You can email them through their website contact page.

DTS-Dead Theologians Society: <http://deadtheologiansociety.com>

- The Dead Theologians Society is a Catholic apostolate for high school age teens and college age young adults. Through the Saints of yesterday, the Dead Theologians Society inspires the youth of today to become the saints of tomorrow. A special charism of the Dead Theologians Society is to pray for the release of the Souls in Purgatory. Its motto is, "Dead to the World, alive in Christ!" This is inspired by Romans 6:11 where St. Paul tells us to be dead to sin but alive in Christ Jesus.
- Contact information: Eddie Cotter, Jr. (Cofounder & Executive Director)
 - P.O. Box 368, Black Earth, WI 53515-0368
 - Email: Eddie@DeadTheologiansSociety.com
 - Phone : 608-767-4063
 - Fax: 608-767-4064

Theology of the Body for Teens: <http://www.tobforteens.com/>

- Theology of the Body for Teens presents the two hottest topics on the planet--God and sex--and "marries" them through Pope John Paul II's compelling vision for love and life. Using a great mix of stories, real-life examples, activities, prayers, and references to the culture that teens understand, Theology of the Body for Teens answers the questions teens have about their own bodies, issues on sexual morality, and how they were uniquely created for greatness.
- Contact information:
 - Call: 800-376-0520
 - Email: sales@ascensionpress.com
 - Ascension Press, P.O. Box 1990, West Chester, PA 19380

Maintaining Healthy Ministry

Did you know you have the power? As an Adult Youth Leader, teens will inevitably look up to you. They may see you as an extension of the Catholic Church, even an extension of God. This may sound exaggerated, but it can easily be true.

It is also true that in relational ministry, there is a tension. Relational ministry challenges you to be open to people and, to build relationships with people, and because of this intimacy, there is a potential to do great good and great harm.

What power comes responsibility.

Because of this power you must respect the influence you may have in the lives of teens. They will trust and believe in you.

If you were to betray that trust by using teens for social, romantic or sexual needs, you would devastate the lives of teens – even if they seem willing at the time. A teen’s relationships with God and other people can be affected for the rest of their lives.

Denying the power of your role can lead you to believe you are in an “equal” relationship with teens. You are not. Accepting the power of the role will help you make the right decisions with teens who trust and look up to you.

LIFESTYLE

- Live your life according to the way Jesus calls us to live.
- Avoid going to bars and nightclubs
- Avoid drinking to the point of drunkenness.
- Be a witness of holy dating or marriage.

- If your youth minister has an event at a home, stay in general shared spaces with teens, not private spaces within the home.

BALANCE

Your personal balance affects all areas of your life: work, spirituality, ministry, relationships, and emotional and physical health. Your Adult Teen Leadership Team and the teens need you to be a healthy person, and we ask that you take the responsibility for yourself. Pay attention to what your mind and body tell you. Below are a few requests we ask you to consider:

- Prioritize – You are first, a child of God; second, depending on your vocation, a priest, a spouse or single; and third, active in your ministry.
- Make sure your ministry allows time for personal prayer and spiritual development.
- Participate regularly in the Sacraments.
- Eat right and exercise regularly. If it helps keep you accountable, do this with a partner to ensure regularly activity.
- Satisfy your need for adult companionship, enabling you to fulfill your own social needs.
- Find a spiritual director or trusted friends (other adults) who both challenge and nourish you to reflect on your own emotional and spiritual well-being.

Maintaining Healthy Ministry is taken from pages 50-52 in Life Teen, Inc. CORE HANDBOOK: a practical guide for Core Members.

Solid Practices for Working with Teens

- Maintain a ministerial relationship. Maintain healthy boundaries. It is more important in your role to be respected than liked.
- Do not isolate yourself with a teen in a confined area. If a teen is in need of direct counsel or sharing, always stay in sight of other Adult Youth Leaders (Core Members) and teens.
- When teens are in need of serious help, remember, you are not a licensed professional. Refer all teens in crisis to the youth minister or priest, so they, in turn, can refer the teen to the appropriate counseling.
- Do not flirt with teens.
- Adult Leaders may not enter into a dating relationship with a teen at any time.
- Never giving a teen alcohol or illegal drugs.
- Refrain from swearing or using foul language, especially in the presence of teens.
- Never speak graphically about sexual activities or allowing teens to do so.
- Never showing pornographic materials to teens.
- Never talk to teens about other teens' personal problems.
- Do not transport teens alone in your vehicle. It is the parent's responsibility for the teen's transportation. If the need arises, it must be brought to the attention of the youth minister to discuss other options.
- Never leave teens unsupervised in church buildings.
- Be aware of and respect a teen's personal space.
- Use verbal praise and reinforcements.
- Sarcasm and negative humor will negatively affect your ability to minister. Be ever mindful of your role and what you represent.

Solid Practices for Working with Teens is taken from pages 53-54 in Life Teen, Inc. CORE HANDBOOK: a practical guide for Core Members.

Identifying Pitfalls in Relational Ministry

- Know and follow Archdiocese of St. Louis Safe Environment Policies and state laws. Make sure you attend a Protecting God's Children training and are familiar with all policies. It will help you minister more effectively and safely in the long run.

- Be aware of how situations can be misinterpreted. If you spend a significant amount of time with a teen, he or she could misinterpret it as an attraction. Be beyond reproach in your ministry.
- Always lead teens to Jesus. Do not lead them to yourself.

Think about who you are glorifying in your ministry. Is it Christ, or is it you?

If it is Christ, you balance the time you spend with teens between praying, teaching, listening, and in other activities to bring teens closer to Christ. You talk about Christ more than you talk about yourself.

If it is you...

- You focus on how much good you are doing for teens.
- You view yourself as a kind of “savior” for teens.
- You depend on Youth Group to fill all your social, spiritual, and emotional needs.
- You build intimate relationships with teens to make you feel good about yourself.
- You lead teens towards activities that lead them away from Christ.
- You ignore feedback from other Adult Leaders who are worried about your ministry with teens.

Danger! Signs you are getting too close...

You have a great responsibility in your role as an Adult Youth Leader. You must be kept accountable, and you need to continually check your behavior and intentions to make sure you are leading teens to Christ and not yourself. This is vital to good ministry.

Recognize that it is possible to get so close to a teen that it feels like a “special” relationship to the teen or to you. It is essential for you to take full responsibility to keep the focus on the relationship on Jesus and your own feelings in check.

Here are some warning signs for you to pay attention to in your ministry and your behaviors. If you find any of these traits in yourself, consult your youth minister about your role as an Adult Youth Leader.

- Wearing special clothes when you know you are going to see a certain teen.
- Spending extra time grooming yourself when you know you are going to see a teen.
- Finding ways or reasons to be alone with a teen.
- Keeping aspects of your relationship with a teen secret from others (such as how often you talk on the phone or see each other alone).
- Giving and receiving gifts from certain teens.
- Neglecting to spend time with other teens because you want to spend more time with a certain teen.
- Sharing personal information about other teens with a certain teen.
- Fantasizing or daydreaming about a certain teen.

Identifying Pitfalls in Relational Ministry is taken from pages 54-56 in Life Teen, Inc. CORE HANDBOOK: a practical guide for Core Members.

Special Circumstances – What about when this happens...?

Discipline Situations

1. Confront the teen in a non-combative manner.
2. Ask if they are familiar with the parish’s guidelines for the event.
3. Never approach a teen or group of teens with anger.
4. If you feel uncomfortable or are unable to control your anger at the moment, ask another Adult Youth Leader for help.
5. Address teens separately rather than in a group. Remove them from others who would be distracted by your discussion.
6. Do not prejudge them. Find out the teen’s side of the story.
7. Repeat what the teen said in your own words. Confirm that what you said was correct.

8. Clearly explain the Archdiocese's and the event guidelines specific to this event and what you observed. Address the action and not the individual.
9. Ask if the teen understands the guidelines and willing to abide by them.
10. Give a concrete suggestion for change and set concrete consequences resulting from their actions.

If the teen refuses to abide by the guidelines, they can either:

1. Choose to leave the event (with parental knowledge)
2. Meet with the Adult Youth Leader or Youth Minister to decide further action.

“Consult not your fears but your hopes and your dreams. Think not about your frustrations, but about your unfulfilled potential. Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in, but with what is possible for you to do.”

-Blessed Pope John XXIII

Discipline Situation are taken from pages 57-58 in Life Teen, Inc. CORE HANDBOOK: a practical guide for Core Members.

Handling a Delicate and/or Crisis Situation

1. Be available and present to the teens.
2. Listen to them.
3. Ask open-ended questions:
 - a. What do you mean?
 - b. When is the last time you thought this?
 - c. Can you explain? How do you feel?
4. Do not enter into their crisis. Remain calm and prayerful.
5. Reserve judgment.
6. If life-threatening or harmful:
 - a. Tell the Youth Minister or priest
 - b. Tell the teen's parents
 - c. Refer the teen to a professional.
7. Be cautious with giving advice. Never push a point or a question if they are uncomfortable with it.
8. Love
 - a. Meet on a regular basis to talk or pray.
 - b. Meet with the teen's family if needed.

Confidentiality must be broken if:

1. A teen reports being abused or abusing someone else – such as a child or an elderly person.
2. A teen reports being a threat to themselves or others.

Eight steps to take when confidentiality must be broken:

1. Inform the teen that you must break confidentiality by telling the Youth Minister or Pastor.
2. Tell either the Youth Minister or pastor, including all important details.
3. Encourage the teen to inform the appropriate parties and ask them if they want you to be present with them. Another option is to ask them if they would want you to inform the appropriate parties.
4. Document the situation in writing immediately.
5. If appropriate, make sure parents are informed.
6. Refer the teen, family, etc., to a professional.
7. Follow-up to confirm that the teen seeks help.
8. Pray.

Handling a Delicate and/or Crisis Situation are taken from pages 60-61 in Life Teen, Inc. CORE HANDBOOK: a practical guide for Core Members.

Leading a Small Group on Retreats (1st Time Youth Leader)

Importance of Small Groups

1. Young people desire to be heard and share what is important to them. They desperately want to be known, accepted, loved, and cared about. They often don't find this environment anywhere else.
2. The Gospel message is personalized. Young people and leaders share what's happening personally.
3. Gives them the opportunity to talk and not be "talked at" by us. Again, it is their small group – primarily a time for them (and not for us!) to talk.
4. Opportunity to simply love young people. Focus on them.

Prepare for Leading a Small Group

1. When you get the agenda and see a time for small groups, pray for your kids. Consider yourself as the personal prayer warrior for each kid in your group even before you meet them. They will be your little band of disciples. Invite Jesus to be your co-leader.
2. You choose your attitude before going in. No matter how they respond, let them know you're glad to have the opportunity to love and pray for them. Consider even starting the group by saying, "I love small groups because I like to hear what you have to say and your opinions."

Once You Have Your Group

1. Have everyone sit at eye level; the same level (all on chairs or all on the floor) and in a circle. No bleachers or stairs. Make sure seating arrangement is in order and teens are comfortable before sharing begins.
2. Establish your own authority – state your guidelines clearly. Authority will make them feel more at peace: "first impressions are lasting impressions." Always speak directly and ask for what you need.
3. Set guidelines: respect, confidentiality, and going around the circle to answer each question. "During my small group, I just ask that you respect whoever is speaking and keeping everything confidential that is shared in this group. Please raise your hand to show that you won't share anything outside of this group that is shared here and now. And, just so you always know whose turn it is, I like to go around the circle for each question. But, don't worry, when it's your turn, if you're not ready, you can say "come back to me", or "leave me alone!" There's no pressure; you don't have to talk.
4. Start with introductions and one or two silly/weird questions. To break the ice, you could begin by saying "Share your name and the worst sin you've committed." Give it a second or two and then say, "Just kidding." Use questions that might get them to laugh or smile (embarrassing moments, etc.), if possible.
5. REMEMBER THEIR NAMES. Even if you must write down their names as they speak, make sure to repeat their names and remember them. Knowing a name communicates power of Jesus love – it is a personal touch.
6. Start by answering the first question (or first few questions) yourself to get the ball rolling. It role models how they should respond. Ask if someone would like to answer a question first. If no one volunteers to start for any question, continue to start with yourself – it takes pressure off of them.
7. Continue to go around the circle, for every question even if several hands are raised with enthusiasm to answer a question. Always choose one person and say, "We'll start with you and go this way." If you fail to go around the circle for every question, it's a guarantee that shy kids will shut down.
8. Be an active listener. Repeat back to them anything significant that they've said, especially if they're struggling to answer completely. Keep good eye contact with whoever is talking. When they're done, say, "thanks" or give some short notion that you understand what they said.
9. If one teen talks to much, look to the next person (this is another reason going in a circle is good), signifying that we should move on. Or, if you must, as politely as possible, throw in a "thank you" when they take a breath.

Praying in Small Group

1. Always begin and end small group with a prayer.
2. Prayer should be short, sweet and to the point. Pray with eyes open.

3. If you open with a prayer, let someone in your group close – ask for a volunteer. Teach them how to pray spontaneously, for a person or a need. Maybe close with a formal prayer. Have them address God and not talk around God. I prefer to have them address Jesus.

When They Don't Talk

If students continue to say “pass”, you might just say to the group as a whole, “I know you guys have opinions and stuff to say, here’s your opportunity.” Avoid singling out a shy kid, though. Continue to be first in answering each question, using answers that you think they can relate to or will spark their brain. If someone offers to pass, ask if they’d like for you to come back to them. They usually answer, “yes”. Some people just need more time. Silence is not bad. Give them a moment if they seem to be thinking and make sure to come back to anyone you skipped to see if they’ve thought of anything.

When Emotions Arise

Let them cry. Don’t overreact. Get them a tissue and make sure they’re done speaking before moving on. Thank them for sharing, show compassion and consider pulling them aside after small group to make sure they’re all right. Don’t let the situation dominate or change the direction of the small group. Others might still need to share important stuff. Remember, your role is to facilitate sharing, not be a counselor.

When a Teen is Negative or Antagonistic

When they say, “I’m not going to answer”, or “I’m not into this Jesus stuff.” Don’t give it a second thought. Simply say, “Okay,” or “Thanks for being honest” and without batting your eye, move on to the next person. Do not debate or look disappointed, expect something like that. This disarms it almost immediately. If they continue to be obstinate, tell them that you (or Youth Minister) will talk to them about their thoughts/concerns after small group. The only times in which commenting back would be appropriate is if they are being openly negative about someone or making incorrect claims about Church teachings.

When they are Rowdy, or Talk about other Things

Discipline:

- 1) Give a look of acknowledgment; 2) A little wave; 3) Say a person’s name and politely ask; 4) Sit between them; 5) Silence is O.K.; 6 You are there to be respected; not necessarily liked, though we hope that happens.

When They’re Done Answering Questions, but you have more time

Be prepared with alternative, both fun and serious, questions. Have a 3 minute testimony on topic to possibly share during last 3 minutes of small group.

When You’re Done with Small Groups

Thank God for being with you.

Remember your group’s names throughout the day. Call them by their name as much as possible, even if it’s just to make sure you have their name correct.

Reach out to the shy, unloved teens or those just in need of extra attention.

If it didn’t go very well, do not assume either of the following: you did a poor job leading or they were a quiet group. Sometime we fail at setting it up well; sometimes they are a quiet group. If you’re concerned with how you’re leading small group, if you continue to have groups where few people talk, as a leader for tips. Remember that your identity is as a child of God; not a small group leader. The success of your small group is not an extension of you. And, remember that teens are not the enemy; they are the battleground.

We can’t force God on them, but we can pray that they choose the Kingdom.

Pray for your kids throughout the day and after the retreat.

Concluding Thoughts

1. Whenever possible, small groups will be all male and all female. Men especially are willing to go deeper if women aren’t present.
2. We don’t have all the answers nor know how to respond to everything. We’re just there to love teens.
3. Allow good humor, but not negative humor.

4. Leading a small group well takes time and practice. Don't be upset with yourself if it takes many retreats before your groups consistently open up.
5. Our attitude should be one of confidence because the Lord is with us.
6. GO AROUND THE CIRCLE EVERY QUESTION!
7. Learn to relax and be yourself, have fun, be at peace.

Spiritual Works of Mercy

- To Instruct the Ignorant
 - Many times I have heard teens on retreats or youth group say, "I've never heard that before!" It's not because they are stupid, but because no one ever told them or no one ever challenged them. They seek the Truth, they seek Jesus, please give Christ to them.
- To Counsel the Doubtful
 - *To you young people, who are in search of a firm hope, I address the very words that Saint Paul wrote to the persecuted Christians in Rome at that time: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:13). – Message from Pope Benedict XVI*
- To Admonish Sinners
 - We must caution and warn teens (and all people) of living a life without God. A mother doesn't let their child play in a busy street and we should not let our brothers and sisters in Christ play in a life of sin and evil. We must show them the light of Salvation in JC.
- To Bear Wrongs Patiently
 - Let's face it, we are all sinners and we need to lovingly lead people back to Jesus and not respond with anger and guilt.
 - Remember that things happen in God's Time, Not Ours so be patient in times of difficulty and in dealing with tough situations.
- To Forgive Others Willingly
 - Without forgiveness, we have no hope. It is the Forgiveness of Jesus and His death on the Cross that saved us, so we must also be willing to forgive others no matter how difficult it is.
- To Comfort the Afflicted
 - It is important that we are there for those hurting and in need, because it is in those moments that Faith in Jesus and Our Church can be strengthened or weakened. One way we can do this is by being present at a funeral or visitation of a teenager's (from your youth group) relative/friend whenever possible, it will mean a great deal to them even if they don't say it.
- To Pray for the Living & the Dead
 - Never forget the power of prayer! When we turn to God, all things are possible!

10 Things I learned as a Youth Minister

by Tom Lancia

1. Teens Don't Care What You Say, Until They Know That You Care!
 - a. Your Heart and Honesty Speaks More Effectively Than Your Knowledge
 - b. Don't lecture, share with them
 - c. Earn their Respect, which means don't ask them to do anything that you wouldn't do yourself.
2. Experiencing Christ is different than learning about Him
 - a. It's important to give them opportunities to experience what you are talking about. Ex: Mass, Adoration, Confession, Praying with each other, Service, Small Groups to express themselves and share, Rosary, etc.
3. Being a Core Member/Youth Minister needs us to be there for teens but also needs boundaries.

- a. Know your environment. Never be alone, protects you both.
 - b. If your unsure if something is O.K., the answer should be no.
 - c. Don't encourage drama. Don't forget you are there for all teens, not just the ones that create the biggest scene or express themselves the most.
 - d. Make time for yourself (personally, professionally, and spiritually).
 - e. Teens shouldn't run your life, because they will if you let them.
4. You Can Only Do What You Can, GOD Will Take Care of the Rest (remember who is in control).
 - a. Be a good Christian Friend and mentor, but know your limits. Talk to parents, pastor, psychologist, but then let God take over. Pray, Pray, Pray.
 - b. Plan for events, but once your there God will take care of it (if he was at the heart of the planning)
 5. DON'T Call Teens "Kids"
 - a. Call them by their name if you can, it will mean a lot to them.
 - b. Groups call teens, your faith family, your posse, ladies and gentlemen, guys, NOT KIDS).
 6. Teens are NOT Adults (Need Time To Process, Be Patient, Still Growing)
 7. Teens Are Seeking for Identity and Answers, Give It to Them! Give them CHRIST!
 - a. If you don't they will figure it out themselves or let their friends figure it out for them: Both are a Scary Thoughts
 8. Teens Need to Have FUN! Christians Should Be Joyful!
 - a. If we don't show them that, what is the desire to this life
 9. Teens Will Surprise You and Teach You, Don't Judge them and be open to letting God work through them.
 10. Unity is important!
 - a. We need to show the teens that we stand up for one another, just as we stand up for them.
 - b. Like parents, we shouldn't fight in front of our teens. If we have a problem with how something was handled by another core, we should discuss that away from the teens.
 - c. We need to support one another and grow as a faith family.
 - d. Just like St. Paul didn't want people to fight over what disciple they belong to, he wants us all to belong to God and not take sides or see who is better.
 - e. Take advantage of your differences, instead of letting those differences divide you. God is showing you something through them.

Tips on Helping Teens Dress with Modesty

By Everett Fritz, Youth Minister in Jensen Beach, FL

8/21/2009

I work at a parish in South Florida that is located about 5 miles from the beach. It is sunny and warm year round and the dress attire of the parish usually reflects the weather. Recently, I was at a funeral at our parish and I looked around to discover that I have never seen so many people at a funeral in tropical shirts, shorts and flip-flops!

The dress of the teens in our youth group usually reflects the warm weather as well – but in a different way. Let's just say that I frequently want to walk around and hand apples to the teenage girls in our youth group. Why? Because when Eve ate of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, she realized she was naked. It is no secret in our youth culture that teenagers dress and act immodestly. The manner in which a person speaks and dresses sends a message. As Christians, our language - both spoken and unspoken - needs to lead others to Christ. Immodesty does just the opposite – it leads others to scandal and sin.

In spite of the frequent problem of immodesty in youth culture, many youth ministers and Core members are afraid to correct teenagers. In my first year as a youth minister, I watched as a youth lector proclaimed the Word of God at Youth Mass in a tank top and a tight mini-skirt. I approached the coordinator of Youth Lectors and asked her why she did not have a stricter dress code for Liturgical Ministry. She replied that she did not want to offend any teenagers for fear of losing them. And that is the problem. Sometimes we measure success in youth ministry by how many teenagers we can get into the doors of the Church instead of measuring success by how many teenagers we are forming to be saints. It is true that we do not want to offend teenagers and push them away, but we do not have to sacrifice the truth of the Gospel either. Teenagers will respond to truth; they will respond to high standards. We simply have to have the courage to call them on to holiness.

Here are some practical tips when addressing teenager immodesty:

Do not be afraid. Truth brings freedom. Teenagers will not hate you if you call them on to holiness.

Set a dress code as often as possible and stick to it. You cannot set a dress code for teens attending Life Nights, but you can for retreats, mission trips, leadership positions, and Liturgical ministries. Make sure that teens are familiar with the dress code beforehand and then stick to it. If they are not dressed appropriately, they should not participate. A teenager may give you a hard time at first, but they will surrender, especially if there is a dress code policy.

Be pastoral when addressing the issue. Calling someone onto holiness should be done in the context of a relationship. No one responds to scolding or preaching. Be pastoral and friendly.

When it comes to immodest dress, try to avoid co-ed correction. If I have to address a teenage girl in regards to a short skirt, I generally ask a female Core member to do it for me. Even though my intentions are pure, I do not want to put myself in a situation where a teenage girl accuses me of looking at her inappropriately.

Avoid correcting a teen in front of their friends. Teenagers do not like to be embarrassed. Instead of making them an example, pull the teenager aside and address the teen one-on-one.

Remember that good relational ministry is the key to addressing immodesty. If a teenager is a leader in your youth group, correcting immodesty is appropriate. If a teenager is new to Life Teen, picking on their choice of clothes is not the best way to lead them to Christ. Get to know a teenager for awhile and use your relationship to call that teen on to holiness. Forming teenagers in sainthood requires patience.

Editors Note: For more help in addressing immodesty, use our Life Night called "Torn Apart - Modest is the Hottest"
