

Stages of Development for 6th-12th Grade Parish Youth Ministry

The purpose of this document is to assist parish leaders by helping them to identify where they are in regard to youth ministry development at their parish. This document can be used as a discussion aid for youth ministry teams or parish staff to foster growth toward realistic goals within their youth ministry programs. It is understood that there is no one-size-fits-all type of ministry, and that not all parishes are the same. This document is simply a tool for discernment and dialogue. Some of it may apply to your parish while other elements do not. The Office of Youth & Young Adult Ministry is available for youth ministry consultation upon request.

As we begin or continue our respective youth ministry programs, let us do so in a spirit of prayer and openness to the Holy Spirit. It is essential that we remain united to Christ in all of our ministerial efforts. "I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing." John 15:5.

Stage 1: Initial Growth - *"We invite you to be receptive to the Church's engagement and ministries with young people, so that you, like those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, can also recognize Christ in your lives, interpret them in light of the Gospel, and choose to set forth on a lifelong path of missionary zeal and commitment." - Listen, Teach, Send: A National Pastoral Framework for Ministries with Youth and with Young Adults*

In this stage, youth ministry is just beginning or continuing in a stage of minimal growth. The stage of *Initial Growth* in a parish is often marked by teens, parents, and/or parish staff members growing in their desire to minister to the youth of the parish, but may be uncertain about the best way to move forward. During this stage, youth ministry offerings may be present at times, but overall are inconsistent and are not necessarily structured with a clear vision that aligns with the mission of the parish. It could also be a stagnant youth ministry program that has existed in the past, but due to circumstances such as a lack of resources has not continued to grow.

Characteristics of Initial Growth:

- **Leadership Structure**: At this stage, the leadership structure is less defined by an individual or group, and more so defined by the initial presence of a raised interest in providing youth ministry opportunities at the parish. An initiative could be led by a parent, volunteer, parish staff member, pastor, or a mix of any of these. Awareness and support of the pastor is needed at each stage of development.
- **Parish Support**: Support from the parish may be isolated, limited, or not present at this time. Some financial support or resources may be available, but this will look different at each parish for various reasons.
- **What It Could Look Like**: There is no official calendar set at this time, as events are more sporadic in their frequency and attendance. Examples of initiatives during this stage

could be the following: A parent with a child in middle school sees an opportunity to nurture the faith of their child by starting a Bible study. The parent decides to host it at the school or parish once each week until the conclusion of the series. The parent and child invite their friends and other parents to attend. Another example could be if the Diocese hosts a large event, and individuals at the parish decide to promote it to the youth and attend as a parish group. Both of these types of events will certainly occur within a more stable youth ministry program, but during the *Initial Growth* stage, they function as stand-alone events and do not have the resources or structure needed to sustain an ongoing ministry.

Steps to Grow to the Next Stage:

1. To move into *Organic Expansion (Stage 2)*, intentional outreach by the pastor, designated youth minister, parents, or other members of the parish increases. This outreach is specific to inviting both youth and adults to join in the mission of leading the young people of the parish to Christ. Though this outreach occurs, numbers alone are not the sole indicator of the growth and success of a program. Each parish is different, as are the numbers and ministerial needs.
2. Leadership roles within the ministry begin to emerge. There may or may not be a designated youth minister at this time, as the efforts could still be led by another parish staff member or a group of volunteers.
3. Youth ministry leaders begin to intentionally discern the spiritual needs and desires of young people at the parish.
4. Pathways are being identified that will foster spiritual growth and formation for the young people involved in the ministry.

Note: The timeline for progressing or regressing into each stage of development can vary widely based on a variety of circumstances such as available resources, changes in parish staff i.e. a new youth minister or pastor, changes in the number of 6th - 12th grade youth that are registered at the parish, etc.

Stage 2: Organic Expansion - *“God shares his presence to and with young people by acting through us: when we accompany and are fully present to a young person, he or she can feel the presence of Christ, who longs to be close to every individual we encounter.” - Listen, Teach, Send*

At this stage, the youth ministry at the parish is growing as adults and youth continue to invite people to become more involved in the ministry. There is emphasis placed on accompaniment, belonging, and community.

There may be a deepening of relationships among the youth as they share their experiences and encounters with God, which will oftentimes take place in a small group setting. Personal

accompaniment of youth may begin to develop within those small groups as well. Adults begin to understand the importance of relational ministry, which emphasizes building authentic, trusted relationships with the youth they are serving. At this stage, the leaders begin to discern and balance their own vision of the ministry vs. what appears to be working. Advocacy for support and resources for the ministry at the parish may begin. This could include representation at parish-related meetings, requests for funding initiatives, reserving meeting spaces on campus, hiring a youth minister, etc.

Characteristics of Organic Expansion:

- **Leadership Structure:** At this stage, the ministry is moving beyond stand-alone events, though there may or may not yet be a designated youth minister at this time. Among the ministry leader(s), there is a growing awareness of the culture of the parish: how youth have engaged with the parish community in the past, ongoing discernment of the spiritual needs of the youth in this particular community, etc. This awareness allows the ministry leaders to set realistic expectations and goals moving forward.
- **Parish Support:** Parish staff members beyond the pastor are aware that youth ministry events are taking place. Announcements in the bulletin as well as at weekend liturgies may occur as outreach to both adults and youth continues. Outside of social events, opportunities for prayer and sacraments may become a more regular part of the ministry. This may result in reserving church spaces more frequently. Financial support may be available, but this will look different at each parish.
- **What It Could Look Like:** A calendar of events may be used internally by the youth ministry leaders. Examples of initiatives will be similar to those in *Initial Growth*, but during this stage there may also be an increase in opportunities to gather along with more events centered on encountering the Lord in prayer and the sacraments. Adult volunteers are intentionally sought out and are asked to join the ministry by those already involved in leadership. Intentional accompaniment of the youth by adult leaders may begin. This accompaniment may occur at regular ministry events and small group settings.

Steps to Grow to the Next Stage:

In order to move into *Structural Development (Stage 3)*, there is a need for intentional programming, a clear leadership hierarchy and a delegation of duties, and ongoing formation for adult leaders. It should be noted that not all youth ministry programs are restricted to a single parish. A few examples can be seen here in our own Diocese with Bosco in Jasper and Goretta in Gibson County. These multi-parish programs have proven to work over time. If a full-time ministry is not possible at this time for your individual parish, you might consider joining with other nearby parishes in your efforts to build a sustainable program.

1. The specific needs of the parish and youth ministry program are identified. If a youth minister isn't already in place, there is strong consideration for hiring someone.

2. The parish may adopt a youth ministry formation program such as EQ Saints or LifeTeen. Other programs and self-created resources may also be used.
 3. Adult volunteers begin to take ownership of their own spiritual growth and development. The parish or Diocese may also provide opportunities for continued adult formation such as the annual Formation Day which is held by the Office of Catechesis each year.
 4. Clearly defined responsibilities and job descriptions for adult leaders are created. Written expectations empower adults to embrace their role within the youth ministry program.
 5. Opportunities are identified for teens to serve, evangelize, and lead both within the youth ministry and the wider parish community. Examples of service outside of youth ministry could include altar serving and liturgical ministries, volunteering for VBS, serving at parish dinners or other events, etc.
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Stage 3: Structural Development - *“The Church, following Christ’s example, is called to do the same: to listen to young people, to teach them the Gospel, and to send them forth into the world, alive in the Spirit. This “listen-teach-send” triptych is a framework to further develop concrete ministerial plans.” - Listen, Teach, Send*

At this stage, there is an established team of leaders that accompany and evangelize the youth. These leaders carry out this work in informal settings as well as parish gatherings, sporting and extracurricular events, etc. During this stage, there will also be an expansion of youth involvement in the life of the parish, which may include participation in liturgical ministries, some form of representation on the parish council, taking part in parish and community events, as well as other ministries of service.

In addition to consistent parish-based youth ministry offerings, broader opportunities may become available such as retreats, conferences, and mission trips including but not limited to TEC, NCYC, Holy Fire, Source and Summit, World Youth Day, Pro-Life events, Diocesan Youth Days, etc.

Characteristics of Structural Development:

- **Leadership structure:** At this stage, it is strongly encouraged for there to be a hired coordinator of youth ministry. The presence of a priest and other clergy at youth ministry events is needed, at least on occasion, and can greatly enhance the program. It’s vital that the pastor has an understanding of the vision and direction of the ministry, and that he is supportive of the efforts of the ministry leaders. There is now a clear chain of command within the ministry, and roles and responsibilities for the adult leadership team have been defined. There may be a youth leadership team as well.
- **Parish Support:** The parish may provide opportunities and resources for adult leaders to receive support, training, and accompaniment. The parish may also support the ministry

financially by providing a salary for the hired minister along with a budget for ministerial needs such as programming subscriptions (e.g., LifeTeen, EQ Saints). There may also be support of and communication for youth ministry fundraisers.

- **What It Could Look Like:** A clear calendar of events has been created and is available for the parish staff to see. Each youth gathering or event has a specific purpose such as community building, encountering Christ, catechesis and formation, service, etc. This vision is clearly understood by the leadership team before each session. There is a structure to all youth ministry events, and a vision for the ministry has taken shape. Youth begin collaborating with other parish ministries such as altar serving or other liturgical duties, Vacation Bible School, service initiatives, or Hispanic or intercultural ministry. Adult leaders receive ongoing faith formation and may receive training in pastoral ministry which could be transferable to other ministries in the parish. The youth minister prioritizes forming and equipping the teams of adult and youth leaders, and will continue to advocate for the resources needed to effectively minister to the young people of the parish.

Steps to Grow to the Next Stage:

To move to *Parish-Wide Shared Responsibility (Stage 4)*, parishioners need to understand that they play a critical role in the sustainability and overall success of the youth ministry. Adults within the parish will see the youth as vital members and contributors to the good of the parish community.

1. The parish develops a culture that has a heart for evangelization and accompaniment for youth. Young people are welcomed and are seen as vital contributors to parish life.
2. A unified vision of youth ministry at the parish is communicated by the youth minister or leadership team to the pastor, parish staff, parish council, etc. A clear calendar of events is accessible to all parishioners. This communication fosters overall buy-in and support of the youth ministry, and it helps parishioners to see it as an integral part of their mission.
3. Though the youth minister is the primary advocate for the ministry to grow and succeed, there are many other adults who are invested and play a role in its success. This model is ideal in order to avoid any one person being held solely accountable for the sustainability of the ministry.
4. Parishes may accompany and support the youth as they graduate from high school, connecting them with their respective Newman Centers or young adult ministries.

Stage 4: Parish-Wide Shared Responsibility - “*The communal dimension of the Catholic faith shows us that those who accompany youth are most effective when they work in collaboration with the entire community... All ministries with youth are part of our universal family of faith.*” - *Listen, Teach, Send*

At this stage parishioners understand and are invested in actively growing and sustaining the youth ministry. The youth minister focuses their efforts on leadership development of adults and youth, advocacy for support and resources, and communication of the overall vision to the parish. Parishioners who are not directly involved with the ministry still acknowledge the needs of the young people of the parish and they see it as important. The youth ministry calendar of events is made public, and all parishioners know when, where, and how they can support the ministry. The youth are seen as a critical gift to the flourishing of the parish, and while being served, are also invited to serve in meaningful ways for the good of the parish community.

Characteristics of Parish-Wide Shared Responsibility

- **Leadership Structure:** There is a coordinator of youth ministry in place, and parish leadership actively supports and sees the importance of the ministry. The youth minister is able to delegate certain tasks of the ministry to adult or youth core team members, which fosters a shared mission and mutual responsibility.
- **Parish Support:** Parishioners that are not directly involved in the youth ministry make a conscious effort to contribute in some way to the ministry either through prayer, time, talent, or treasure. The annual budget of the parish includes support for youth ministry. The parish actively communicates ministry events along with updates, which may occur through the bulletin, email communications, or Mass announcements..
- **What It Could Look Like:** The calendar of events is available for all parishioners to see. Youth and adult leaders are active in parish ministries outside of the youth ministry program. Parish staff members all understand the vision and mission of the youth ministry program. If a school is attached to the parish, their staff may actively work with the youth minister to foster growth and awareness of ministry offerings. In addition to the greater intentionality of programming achieved in the *Structural Development* stage, there is an overall deepening of parish-wide support of youth ministry efforts. The parish may also consider hosting young adult social gatherings, formation opportunities, or other resources for recent graduates.



Office of Youth & Young
Adult Ministry