

St. Paul's Parish Youth and Family Ministry Strategic Plan

Prepared for the parishioners of St Paul's Catholic Church –
Airdrie, AB



St. Paul's Catholic Church

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Dear Friends in Christ,

This strategic plan allows us to assess the best our parish has to offer our youth and families as well as acknowledge potential areas for growth. Using that information, we will move forward together to achieve our goals and plan for providing a strong and vibrant youth and family ministry program.

I am profoundly grateful for all the people that have worked on this ground-breaking project for the benefit of St. Paul's Parish. I would like to acknowledge and thank all the parishioners and individuals who gave so much of their time and input into the development of this plan

The enthusiasm surrounding this project makes me proud to assist this great parish, and I am excited for what lies ahead. Our goal is to help all our youth and families participate together — providing opportunities for everyone to be involved, to feel welcome, to grow spirituality, and to work together to go out and make disciples. Please take the time to review the plan and look for ways that you and members of your family can get involved and help our church family continue to grow in faith, love, and service.

Deacon Gary Haney

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The Process and Reason Behind the Plan

In 2019 with the resignation of our youth group leader, all parish youth group activities came to a complete halt. This was because the program was dependent on one person organising all facets of our youth ministry. Due to the lack of information and resources we were at a loss as how to move forward.

It was decided at a parish council meeting to totally rebuild our youth group program from the ground up. It was agreed that the new program should not be dependent on one staff member or volunteer. We needed to have transition plans in place in case of staff or volunteer changes.

It was also agreed that the program should involve the participation of a wider range of youth, their families, the schools and cooperation with other faith youth groups in the community. The program should cover all areas of ministry and activities that would provide a well-rounded experience and faith formation. The program should be welcoming, fun and provide opportunity for spiritual and personal growth.

The plan is the result of a strong collective effort by committed parishioners representing St. Paul's Church as well as others from the community and it will need to be embraced and implemented by all to make this great parish of ours even greater!

**Youth with a clear direction
is the promise of
a bright and happy future for all.**

Developing Our Youth Ministry Strategy

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" *Matthew 28:18b-19*

Jesus commissions us to make disciples and we respond to this commission in a variety of ways. Youth Ministry is one such response to the Great Commission. So how does a parish get started with a Youth Ministry program? Below is some basic information about what youth ministry means in the Catholic Church, what types of leadership are needed for youth ministry, and a program development cycle that will help parish leaders start a youth ministry response in the local faith community.

Definition of Catholic Youth Ministry

Catholic youth ministry is the response of the Christian Community to the needs of young people and the sharing of the unique gifts of youth with the larger community. Catholic youth ministry is not limited to participation in a particular program or having a youth group; youth ministry is the relationship young people have with the Church.

Three Goals of Catholic Youth Ministry

1. **Empowerment**- to empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today.
2. **Participation**- to draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission and work of the Catholic faith community
3. **Growth**- to foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person

Seven Themes of Comprehensive Youth Ministry

1. **Developmentally Appropriate**- Effective ministry responds to the developmental growth of young and older adolescents by developing

programs and strategies that are age-appropriate and strategically focused to contribute to the positive development of youth.

2. **Family Friendly**- Effective ministry recognizes the family as an important setting for ministry and provides links between the programs of youth ministry and the family home through the sharing of information, inclusive programs and resources.
3. **Intergenerational**- Effective ministry utilizes the intergenerational parish community by developing shared programs and by connecting youth to adults in the community.
4. **Multicultural**- Effective ministry provides for ministry to youth in the context of their culture and ethnic heritage. Effective ministry also promotes cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.
5. **Community-wide Collaboration**- Effective ministry promotes collaboration with leaders, agencies and congregations in the wider community. This collaboration includes sharing information, sponsoring programs and developing advocacy efforts.
6. **Leadership**- Effective ministry mobilizes the people of the faith community to become involved in youth ministry efforts by providing for diverse roles and commitments for adults and youth.
7. **Flexible and Adaptable Programming**- Effective ministry provides flexible and adaptable program structures and ministry responses to address the variety of youth and families in our community.

Eight Components of a Comprehensive Youth Ministry

"These ministry components describe the "essence" of ministry with adolescents and provide the Church with eight fundamental ways to minister effectively with adolescents... These components provide a framework for the Catholic community to *respond* to the needs of young people and to *involve* young people in sharing their unique gifts with the larger community... A comprehensive ministry with adolescents provides balance among all eight components" (*Renewing the Vision*, p. 26).

1. **Advocacy**-The ministry of advocacy engages the Church to examine its priorities and practices to determine how well young people are integrated into the life, mission, and work of the Catholic community. Advocacy also places adolescents and families first by analyzing every program and policy for its impact on adolescents and families.
2. **Catechesis**- The ministry of catechesis helps adolescents develop a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and the Christian community; increase their knowledge of the core content of the Catholic faith; enrich and expand their understanding of the Scripture and the sacred tradition and their application to life today; and live more faithfully as disciples of Jesus Christ in their daily lives, especially through a life of prayer, justice, and loving service.
3. **Community Life**- The ministry of community life builds an environment of love, support, appreciation for diversity, and judicious acceptance, which models Catholic principles; develops meaningful relationships; and nurtures Catholic faith.
4. **Evangelization**- The ministry of evangelization shares the Good News of the reign of God, invites young people to hear about the Word Made Flesh and incorporates several essential elements: *witness, outreach, proclamation, invitation, conversion, and discipleship*.
5. **Justice & Service**- The ministry of justice and service nurtures in young people a social consciousness and a commitment to a life of justice and service rooted in their faith in Jesus Christ, in the Scriptures, and in Catholic social teaching; empowers young people to work for justice by concrete efforts to address the causes of human suffering, to serve those in need, to pursue peace, and to defend the life, dignity, and rights of all people; and infuses the concepts of justice, peace, and human dignity into all ministry efforts.
6. **Leadership Development**- The ministry of leadership development calls forth, affirms, and empowers the diverse gifts, talents, and abilities of adults and young people in our faith communities for comprehensive ministry with adolescents; encourages and trains leaders; and involves a wide diversity of adults and youth leaders in a variety of roles.

7. **Pastoral Care-** The ministry of pastoral care involves promoting positive adolescent and family development through a variety of positive/preventive strategies; caring for adolescents and families in crisis through support, counseling, and referral to appropriate community agencies; providing guidance as young people face life decisions and make moral choices; and actively challenges systems that are obstacles to positive development. Pastoral care is most fundamentally a relationship- a ministry of compassionate presence. Pastoral care enables healing and growth to take place within individuals and their relationships.

8. **Prayer & Worship-** The ministry of prayer and worship strives to celebrate and deepen young people's relationship with Jesus Christ through the bestowal of grace, community prayer and liturgical experiences; awaken young people's awareness of the spirit at work in their lives; incorporate young people more fully into the sacramental life of the Church, especially Eucharist; nurture the personal prayer life of young people; and foster family rituals and prayer.

Starting a Youth Ministry Program

Below is a systematic approach for developing youth ministry programs using the **Program Development Cycle**. The Program Development Cycle includes 4 major stages that are divided into 9 steps. These steps follow a particular linear order but it is important to know that it is entirely possible to have to "recycle back" to a previous step at any time in the development process. This "recycling" is an important and necessary means of keeping your ministry current.

STAGE A: MISSION OF THE CHURCH

In this stage, it is important to develop an understanding of the larger mission of the Church so that the ministry responses developed by the Ministry Coordinating Team match the goals of the Church. This stage remains relatively unchanged since the mission and goals of the Church remain constant. The information in the "Definition of Catholic Youth Ministry" section above covers the two steps in this stage of the program development cycle.

STEP 1: Ministry Philosophy

It is critically important to know and understand what the Church wants to accomplish through Youth Ministry. As stated above, the definition of Youth Ministry is the response of the Christian community to the needs of young people and the sharing of the unique gifts of youth with the larger community. This definition, or "ministry philosophy," is what differentiates Catholic Youth Ministry from what other youth-serving agencies such as the YMCA or local baseball/softball league are trying to accomplish with their programs.

STEP 2: Agency Goals

As with the program philosophy that we find in the definition of Catholic Youth Ministry, we also find our "agency goals" from the Renewing the Vision document. The goals of empowerment, participation, and growth give us general directions for the development of our ministry responses. Understanding these goals is vital to ministry development as we must make certain that the ministry responses we are developing actually meet one or more of these goals.

STAGE B: TARGET MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT

This stage focuses on the needs of a target group by assessing the target group's needs and matching these needs with available resources.

STEP 3: Needs Assessment & Analysis

The purpose of this step is to identify and analyze needs and desires so ministry responses that are based on the ministry philosophy and agency goals can be developed to meet these needs. A needs assessment can take many forms, from written surveys to one-on-one interviews.

A needs assessment must be done systematically so there is an accurate view of the "big picture". A systematic approach also helps the Ministry Coordinating Team avoid falling into some common pitfalls. Some pitfalls to watch for include assessing only a few people or only the ones who show up for our ministry programs regularly (does not offer enough diversity), or only listening to those who are assertive enough to seek us out and express their needs (sometimes called the "squeaky wheel syndrome.")

During your needs assessment, the Ministry Coordinating Team will find that there are three different groups whose needs should be assessed: youth, their families, and the parish. Each of these groups has unique needs from youth ministry programming. Another group to consider assessing is the wider community that the parish is a part of.

During your analysis of the data gathered from a needs assessment, another common pitfall is to assume that any of your target groups are looking for a specific program to be involved in. Very rarely will needs assessments identify an existing program that can be implemented right away. The goal of a needs assessment is to be able to identify a real need that can be met by ministry efforts. The most basic flaw in planning occurs when we do not focus on the real needs of the people that we aim to serve. Assessing needs with an open mind can be difficult for some leaders in Youth Ministry because we might have preconceived ideas on what young people need from Youth Ministry. This is a closed attitude that does not allow leaders to be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit! Be prepared for a Metanoia experience when analyzing data from a needs assessment.

Analyzing data also includes making interpretations based on your ministry philosophy and goals as well as the available resources of the faith community. It is very likely that a needs assessment will discover more needs than the existing resources can cover, or that there are some needs that do not fit in well with the mission of the Church. For example, an assessment might identify a need for a youth center to be built at your parish. But an analysis of available resources might reveal that the ability of your faith community to build such a center is unrealistic.

STEP 4- Develop Specific Ministry Goals

Using the goals of Youth Ministry above and the information learned from your needs assessment, you can develop any number of general goals that a parish community can accomplish to help meet the needs identified in the needs assessment above. These goals are only partial descriptions of ministry options and not the final product that is being developed. Think of goals as a map that tells us where we want to go but does not give us a specific route to get there. Goals might only include a statement about meeting the needs of a specific age group or other demographic group within the parish (i.e. incoming high school freshmen have expressed a strong need to feel welcome at their new school in the early part of the

school year). Or, you might discover that certain times of the day, week, season or year will work better for gathered events.

The list of goals will have to be prioritized so resources can be allocated more effectively. Make sure the ministry goals that are developed are consistent with the program philosophy and goals articulated by our Bishops. Also, by developing a list of goals, you are filling in details on the map on where the Ministry Coordinating Team wants to go. Having a map like this is an invaluable tool for helping you share your vision!

STEP 5: Program Design

Now that there is a map in place, it's time to start conceptualizing and developing ministry programs that respond to your goals and get you where you want to go on your map. This step is the transitional step between needs assessment and program delivery. During the program design process, ministry responses are conceptualized through a creative process that includes brainstorming possible options, meetings and discussions with stakeholders, onsite evaluations, and virtually any number of other methods for "experiencing" a program before it is implemented to ensure it meets its intended purpose.

Two main options are available when developing programs: utilize an existing resource or create a new program.

Existing Resources- Resources can be anything available in your local area that is helpful for your ministry plans: people, facilities, events, other existing programs, etc. The Ministry Coordinating Team might discover that a ministry that meets your needs is already in place in your parish, it's just a matter of making it more "youth friendly." Or, outside your parish there may be other programs in place that will meet your needs. By plugging into resources that are already available in your parish or community, you do not have to "reinvent the wheel" as the cliché goes!

There are also ministry options in place through the diocese that your program plan can plug into.

There are also countless ministry options available commercially. Be sure to research these companies thoroughly as not all Christian providers share the same ministry philosophy as the Catholic Church. And even

Catholic sources may not be suitable, either. A list of available options should be easy to develop by doing some research during the program design step of the program development cycle and by networking with other Youth Ministry leaders.

Create a New Program- If an existing ministry is not in place and there are no opportunities in the local community, the Ministry Coordinating Team needs to consider designing a new program.

When designing a program, there are several factors that keep the program focused. A program must fit in with the mission of the parish, meet an identified and prioritized need, and be feasible with the parish's resources. While there will be a lot of good ministry program ideas, if an idea does not fit in with these three points, the Ministry Coordinating Team needs to make an honest assessment of the situation and stop developing programs that do not fit in.

STAGE C: OPERATION STRATEGIES

In this stage, a written program design is finalized and a program leader implements the written plan. This is the most visible part of the program development cycle.

STEP 6: Ministry Plan

A ministry plan should be prepared in writing so Program Leaders and Support Staff can work from the same "blue print." The written plan communicates the ministry concept for everyone involved in its implementation and helps everyone realize the programmer's vision intended by the design. A written plan is also useful during the evaluation step and serves as a valuable resource when there is leadership turnover. Written plans are also a helpful resource for sharing the vision and building support for the program.

How do you know when you have an adequate program plan? When you can hand a Program Leader your program design package and that person can implement the program without direct intervention from the program designer, you know your program design has covered all the essential information needed for a successful program. Please note that what I describe here is the ideal. In practice, a program design might only have

vague concepts in place that the individual Program Leader and the Support Team will have to interpret to fit their needs.

STEP 7: Implementation

In this step, all the aspects of the program design are put into motion. This includes identifying and securing program space, developing promotional materials, recruiting and training staff, developing a budget, securing transportation, acquiring the materials needed for the program, etc. Some programs will be very easy to implement right away, others will need to be implemented over a period of time.

There is another important factor to examine at this point in the program development cycle, too. During the program development cycle, it may be clear that there are more needs identified than any one ministry program can meet. Look back at the Leadership Structure for Youth Ministry above. If only one person is coordinating and leading programs, that person will easily be overwhelmed by the responsibilities of implementing a program and will have little time for developing more ministries. A team approach is truly necessary to realize the full potential of Youth Ministry in a parish.

By developing a Ministry Coordinating Team, there will be a group of people who are constantly working with this program development cycle in collaboration with the Coordinator of Youth Ministry. The Coordinator of Youth Ministry's responsibility is to identify and train Program Leaders and Support Staff to run the individual ministries that are planned collaboratively with the Ministry Coordinating Team. While the Program Leaders and Support Staff are running programs, the Coordinator of Youth Ministry and the Ministry Planning Team are working on other programs that are in different stages of this development cycle.

STAGE D: FOLLOW-UP ANALYSIS

Just as you evaluated needs via the needs assessment in step 3, the Ministry Coordinating Team needs to constantly assess if ministry programs are meeting intended goals. In this stage, a ministry is evaluated and a decision is made about the disposition of the program.

STEP 8: Evaluation

After a particular ministry program has been completed, it is important to take the time to evaluate its effectiveness (if a program is on-going, an evaluation should be done at regular intervals). The process of evaluating a ministry helps us judge the worth of the ministry that has been offered. This step is oftentimes skipped because there is a natural tendency to avoid dealing with negative criticism, especially after investing considerable time and energy developing and delivering a program.

As part of the evaluation, we should not only ask program participants what they thought about the ministry event they just experienced, but we also need to evaluate how well the program met our stated goals. Remember the map analogy above? Did you arrive at your intended destination??? Evaluations should be done systematically just like the needs assessment. Once evaluation data has been compiled and analyzed, the Ministry Coordinating Team needs to make a decision about the worth of a program.

STEP 9: Disposition Decision

There are three choices on the disposition of a program once a critical analysis has been made: continue offering the ministry program, modify the program so that it adjusts to changing needs, or terminate a ministry that is no longer effective. Another factor that needs to be considered in a disposition decision is where the program is in its "life cycle." All programs have a five-step "life cycle" of transitions that include introduction, growth, maturation, saturation, and decline. A brief explanation for the Program Life Cycle is below.

- The Introduction Stage of the Program Life Cycle is when a new ministry is first introduced. This stage involves considerable effort on the part of all levels of leadership in Youth Ministry to ensure the program launches successfully.
- During the Growth Stage of the Program Life Cycle, the level of participation in a ministry increases rapidly. If a program is launched but does not reach this stage, the Ministry Coordinating Team should "recycle" the program concept through the development stages to see if modifications in design can help move the program along.

- In the Maturation Stage, participation demand remains relatively constant and will no longer grow. Lack of growth does not mean that the program is no longer effective. But it does signal that new management strategies will be needed to sustain the ministry effort.
- Programs are in the "saturation" phase of their life cycle when the rate of participation starts to drop. Or, perhaps the need for the program has changed and participants are no longer interested in the ministry in its current format. When programs are evaluated, look for signs that the ministry has hit the "saturation" phase. This stage is a critical time when choices must be made about the content of a program or how it is being "marketed" to its intended audience.
- The Decline Stage is marked by a significant drop in participation, either suddenly or over a period of time. Without direct intervention, a ministry that is declining will either die or "petrify." A program is petrified when only a small number of supporters remain entrenched in their resolve to keep the program running.

Programs that are still being introduced, are showing signs of growth, or can be classified as "mature" will most likely be continued.

When an evaluation analysis reveals that a ministry is in the Saturation or Decline Stages, the Ministry Coordinating Team must decide on whether or not to revitalize the program, or to end it altogether so that resources can be redirected to ministries that are at a healthier point in their life cycle. By recycling a program through the program development cycle, the Ministry Coordinating Team can gain new insights on why a program is declining and make informed decisions on a program's final disposition.

When a program has declined or petrified and is no longer meeting a need, it is time to end the program. Before taking this option, make sure to analyze the implications that ending a program may have on those served by the program and the parish community. For some activities, it may be necessary to develop some form of official "de-commissioning" service so past participants and leaders can "mourn" the loss of something that was once held very dear to them.

The Planning Process

Our Mission Statement

In partnership with parishioners, families, school and the community, St. Paul's youth and family ministry foster to help our youth to grow in their faith and ability to become responsible, happy and engaged disciples of Christ.

Our Vision

We envision that the youth of St. Paul's will experience God, His love, His truth, and His life-changing power. That they will be transformed and will become a redemptive presence in our community and beyond.

Our vision is to see transformed youth, transforming our community and beyond, so that our impact will not end with the youth that we serve, but rather it will continue to benefit the community as these youth become faithful disciples of Christ and positive contributing members of society.

Our Principles

We strongly believe there are six core principles necessary for an effective youth and family ministry.

1. It must be gospel and family centred.
2. It must be built on strong leadership.
3. Scripture, music, charity and community involvement must all be present.
4. It must be fun and exciting.
5. It must be inclusive.
6. It must involve partnership with parents, parishioners and the community.

Our Objectives

1. Expand our programs to involve youth from elementary school right up to young adult.
2. Involve several people in the leadership and planning of the programs to provide uninterrupted program facilitation due to staff or volunteer changes.
3. Involve the whole family in our programs.
4. Involve the schools.
5. Involve collaboration with the community outside our local parish and church.
6. Provide sessions and events that are engaging, fun and faith building.

SWOT

STRENGTHS: Positive attributes internal to the organization or situation that are within your control

- Strong volunteer presence in our parish.
- Access to a wide range of talents required to facilitate our programs.
- Schools willing to be involved.
- Commitment to creating an effective and lasting program.

WEAKNESSES: Internal factors within your control that may impede your ability to meet your objectives

- Our ability to communicate the message both in and out of the parish.
- Relying on a few key personal rather than recruiting and training many.

OPPORTUNITIES: External factors that the organization or project should (or could) develop

- Family involvement.
- Desire of youth to become involved.

THREATS: External factors beyond your control that could place the organization at risk

- Covid 19 and any health guidelines.
- Fear in approaching parishioners for volunteer involvement.

Our Six Initiatives

1. Create age appropriate groups and programs and then promote to youth in the parish and schools.
2. Present the program to the parish.
3. Identify areas of leadership required to facilitate our programs, define their responsibilities and recruit people to fill them.
4. Meet with the schools and involve them in the programs.
5. Develop collaborative relationships with other faith and community entities.
6. Run regularly scheduled sessions and special events in the parish, schools and community.

Our Plan

September - December 2020

- Inform the parish about this initiative and recruit a leadership team.
- Meet with schools for input and cooperation with program.
- Hold initial team meeting and create needs assessment questionnaire.

January - May 2021

- Circulate the needs assessment questionnaire to the parish and schools.
- Collect and review the questionnaires.
- Create the youth Group operational plan.
- Identify and recruit possible ministry volunteers.
- Meet with outside faith and community groups.

June - August 2021

- Present new youth and family ministry program to parish.
- Start group sign up.
- Finalise curriculum.

September 2021

- Facilitate first youth group meetings.
- Report back to parish council with the progress of the program.

June 2022

- Review and evaluate the program.
- Make required changes and start preparation for the 22/23 ministry year.

Conclusion

Helping our youth to grow in their faith and build a strong future for the church and our community will be a daunting task in these everchanging days. It is our responsibility to get over our fears and step forward to guide our youth in faith and family life.

If everyone does their part, we can and will have a vibrant youth and family ministry in our parish. I pray that you take this need to heart and help it become a reality for our youth, our families, a better community and a glorious future for our church.

Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.

(Matthew 19:13-15)