Purpose Driven Total Youth Ministry

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This paper proposes a vision of total youth ministry. It is based on the USCC's Vision of Youth Ministry, 1976 and Renewing the Vision, 1986, as well as Rick Warren’s The Purpose-Driven Church.

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Introduction

This plan describes a vision for a total youth ministry (TYM) program. It is firmly rooted in the USCC’s vision of youth ministry as well as in the church model presented by Rick Warren in his book The Purpose Driven Church.

Overall, the following steps to produce a successful TYM program are:

- Assess the needs of the parish’s youth and their families
- Develop a plan and a vision as a response to the needs
- Unite existing youth programs under this common vision
- Establish new relationships and programs to youth, with youth, by youth, and for youth
- Enable the gifts of others, young and old, laity and religious, to form a partnership in youth ministry

Since the needs of all parish communities differ from each other, to assume that a one-size-fits-all approach would be counterproductive. A structured assessment of the parish’s and the community’s needs consisting of face-to-face/door-to-door discussions and information gathering as well as both formal and informal surveys can over time reveal the parish’s long-term strategy.

However, given a common set of challenges that most parish communities face, several programs are worth considering implementing immediately:

- A junior-high/middle-school age and/or senior-high school age youth groups
- A Confirmation preparation program consisting of spiritual instruction through, mentoring programs (that cover age-sensitive and age-appropriate topics such as relationships, communication and listening skills, prayer, and liturgical-based Catholic Christian teachings), overnight retreats, and service projects (formal, parish-wide, and well-planned projects like the 30-hour Famine)
- Youth-based service projects for all ages
- Youth-aware worship with high-quality, relevant contemporary music for youth and their families.

This plan also follows a larger context based on the church model presented by Rick Warren in his book The Purpose Driven Church. Mr. Warren’s book is based on two major premises: The Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37-40) and The Great
Commission (Matt. 28: 19-20). These two premises are also summarized in Ephesians 4:11-13:

11 It was [Jesus] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

The overarching goal for any Total Youth Ministry program is to maintain the process “to lead [youth] to a deeper commitment and greater service for Christ” [Warren, 1995] as fully Confirmed adult members of the parish community. And because of the belief that “…Christian life involves more than just believing – it also includes belonging” [Warren, 1995], a TYM program strives to continue to sensitize the parish community to the needs of its youth as well as help youth grow and fully participate in the parish community.

This larger context more firmly unites a TYM program with all parish ministries and the Catholic Church’s three-fold mission:

- Proclaim the Good News of salvation
- Offer itself as a group of people transformed by the Holy Spirit
- Bring God's justice and love to others through service
Purpose-Driven Total Youth Ministry

There are three principles of purpose-driven total youth ministry. First, in leading youth to “a deeper commitment and greater service for Christ,” youth must be helped to realize that a personal relationship with Christ is the answer to their deepest needs. “The Good News offer lost people what they are frantically searching for: forgiveness, freedom, security, purpose, love, acceptance, and strength. It settles our past, assures our future, and gives meaning to today” [Warren, 1995]. Therefore, purpose-driven TYM cannot just proclaim that Christ is the answer; it must show youth how Christ is the answer in relevant and practical ways.

Secondly, purpose-driven TYM must help youth develop a lifestyle of evangelism, worship, fellowship, discipleship, and ministry. Our goal is to produce “doers of the Word, not hearers only – to transform, not merely inform” [Warren, 1995].

Thirdly, purpose-driven TYM must teach young people life skills to prepare them to handle character-building circumstances like conflict, disappointment, difficulty, temptation, and delays.

These three principles as they apply to a purpose-driven Catholic-based TYM are further discussed below.

Ministering to the Unchurched

Total youth ministry requires us to be willing to minister to youth and their families that seem unattractive and even revolting to us, including their questionable lifestyles and hang-ups (usually based out of ignorance) about the Catholic Church and organized religion in general. It requires existing members to take a selfless attitude and create a safe environment for unbelievers at the expense of their own preferences, traditions, and comfort. TYM must be “effective in attracting the unchurched and building a pool for evangelism” [Warren, 1995].

This means it could get messy and very uncomfortable for certain adults and parents as the world’s consumerism, individualism, and a very active “passive” tolerance to moral non-integrity is examined.
If We Build It, They Will Come

Rick Warren uses a concentric circle model to illustrate the various levels of commitment and needs in a parish community. Over the first several years, specific efforts are made to convert the youth community (those living around the church that never or occasionally attend Mass) to a crowd (regularly attending youth at Mass). Later, over the next several years, additional specific efforts are made to convert the crowd to a congregation (committed members of the parish and to Christ).

Undoubtedly, there is a small number of youth who are ready to move from a congregation to the committed (serious about spiritual maturity) and even to the core (members who actively serve in ministry and the mission of the church). A framework and a process that can move youth from the community to the core is required.

The Boy Scouts of America have a handbook that helps scouts move through the ranks from Tenderfoot to Eagle Scout. Scouts must fulfill requirements in the earlier ranks that essentially teach them scouting skills. As they advance, the later ranks require scouts to use the previously learned skills for the better of the community and others. A similar model can be used to help youth become part of the core where the focus say for junior-high school age youth is to teach essential skills. Later, those same youth - only older - can use their learned skills for the better of the community and others.

What Gets Measured Gets Done

Success is measured by the ability to meet universal needs for love, acceptance, forgiveness, meaning, self-expression, and a purpose for living as well as freedom from fear, guilt, worry, resentment, discouragement, and loneliness.

To this end, being “ruthless in evaluating [youth] services and ministries” is a key to success” [Warren, 1995]. Continually examining each youth program and service to assess its effectiveness is essential. If it is no longer effective, it must be abandoned.

A Catholic Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry

To remain firmly rooted in the Catholic Christian faith traditions, Catholic total youth ministry progress are based in part on two documents published by the United States Catholic Conference: it’s seminal publication on youth ministry in
1976 called, Vision of Youth Ministry and its follow-up ten years later in 1986 called Renewing the Vision; two key documents that form the basis of many Catholic Church youth ministry programs across the country.

The USCC’s vision describes a community’s response to the needs of its youth as total youth ministry. Better stated:

"Youth Ministry is a concept that embraces all of the many ways that the faith community responds to its youth. It is not a single program but a variety of programs that are united in a common philosophy and purpose."1

One of the most significant aspects of the USCC's vision of total youth ministry is its recognition that youth are active members of a faith community - not only future members. This allows our young adults to live and pray as equal partners within our Parish and community. With guidance, young people are extremely capable of assisting our Parish and our Church with its threefold mission - both as individuals and members of a faith community. This attitude is a fair challenge to many people, both young and old.

**Dimensions of Total Youth Ministry**

What is our approach to engage our youth in the Church's threefold mission? The USCC promotes four dimensions that total youth ministry is to approach and engage youth:

- With youth - right along side them and not from a distance or without them
- To youth - primary (and not the only) beneficiaries of relationships and programs
- By youth - with guidance, ministering to each other
- For youth - advocating their equality in the "human food chain" of influence

**Goals of Total Youth Ministry**

Within these four dimensions, total youth ministry attempts to reach the following goals:

- Foster total personal and spiritual growth
- Draw young people to responsible participation in the life and mission of the faith community.

It would be incomplete to build a vision of youth ministry without attempting to consider addressing these goals for youth of all ages and levels of participation.

Therefore, youth ministry attempts to reach youth of all ages - from elementary to early adult life - since growth and participation does not start nor end at a specific age.

**Components of Total Youth Ministry**

While attempting to reach youth of all ages, total youth ministry consists of seven important elements:

- Word - evangelization, catechesis
- Worship - liturgy, prayer, music
- Community - active participation
- Guidance and healing - counseling and reconciliation
- Justice and service - broadening concerns beyond themselves
- Enablement - lead, minister to themselves; draw adults to share experiences
- Advocacy - "voice of youth"

A well-informed and structured total youth ministry seeks to address each of these elements and promote active involvement of youth in the planning of existing and new activities. All youth-oriented activities need to be aware of these elements and in themselves contain an aspect of each. How would each of these elements be present in a CYO program? Or in a Cub Scout, Boy Scout, or Girl Scout troop? Or at a dance?

**Underlying Principles of Total Youth Ministry**

Total youth ministry is rooted in several underlying principles that guide the formation and operation of ministering with, to, by, and for youth:

- Adolescent years are a unique time of personal development
- Total youth ministry is concerned with the total person (and in our opinion, all ages of the total person)
- Total youth ministry is rooted in relationships - with peers, parents, family, and significant non-related adults. With respect to parents, conventional wisdoms and autocratic or permissive parenting styles need to be called into question and evaluated against the Gospel. Challenging our youth without challenging their families with the Gospel message (and provide contemporary practical steps to live it day-to-day) lessens the desired effect and leaves youth disillusioned. Delivering consistent Gospel messages to the entire family has a far greater chance at succeeding.
- Total youth ministry is a call to community - to become active members and to be community (parish and civil) "activists" by ministering with, to, by, and for others. With respect to our own parish community, are our youth viewed
as valuable, contemporary partners or are they viewed as a slave labor workforce, set aside to perpetually "pick up the pieces"?

- Total youth ministry is affirming the individual gifts of each young people and the adults who minister to youth

### Confirmation Preparation

The foremost goal for the Confirmation sacramental preparation is to prepare and lead youth to:

- A deeper commitment and greater service for Christ” [Warren, 1995] as fully Confirmed adult members of the parish community.

- Develop a lifestyle of evangelism, worship, fellowship, discipleship, and ministry.

A combination of spiritual instruction through mentoring programs with adults and Confirmation sponsors, overnight retreats, and service projects is used to focus on moving candidates from the congregational to the committed, and maybe even to the core; from the uncommitted and unchurched as junior-high school age youth to mature believers fully participating in the mission of the Catholic Church.

Courses/activities/events are based and adapted from Rick Warren’s Purpose Driven Baseball Diamond process that prepares parishioners for the Great Commission by first knowing Christ (fellowship), growing in Christ (discipleship), serving Christ (ministry), and finally sharing Christ (evangelism). [Warren, 1995]

A comprehensive strategy with an organized plan for helping youth to continue to spiritually mature after they receive the sacrament of Confirmation is required. Newly confirmed candidates must be treated as “new believers” and given a sound roadmap for spiritual maturity. An intentional process that helps young people match their skills with parish ministries is a small part of this strategy.

Minimally, the parish must be ready to help young people serve as alter servers, Eucharistic Ministers, greeters, and ushers.

### Overnight Confirmation Retreats

One of the main goals of most overnight retreats is to gather the Confirmation candidates in one place in order to build a sense of community among them. While this goal is admirable, there are many ways to build a sense of community among Confirmation candidates. Unfortunately, the goal of building community...
stands in the way of the first and foremost purpose of any retreat - to change lives. A sense of community is a natural outcome of any retreat. But, to walk out of a retreat as a totally different person - actually believing that they are “ok” and loved by Jesus - with a renewed Christian purpose is the true measure of any retreat experience. This requires a significant amount of planning and resources to achieve.

Tarfy™ Spiritual Happening retreats have been offered to a number of parishes in Nashua and Manchester for over 24 years. Over half of the participants on any given retreat attend not to meet any Confirmation sacramental program requirement; they attend solely on their own. A lot of participants attend this retreat several years in a row.

Tarfy™ Spiritual Happenings is a collaborative youth peer-ministry program designed to have both youth and their adult advisors share the retreat experience together. The retreat leadership team is made up of youth and adults. Many of the adults have been assisting with this retreat program for five years or more and were once retreat participants themselves. The leadership team meets from August through October each year to plan skits, witness talks, and prayer services. The retreat format is adopted from the Cursillo retreat format.

The retreat program typically falls on Columbus Day weekend. It starts with a weekday mass on Friday night and ends with a Sunday Liturgy. Participants leave Infant Jesus Church after Mass on Friday and return Sunday around 5:00 p.m. St. Basil’s in Methuen, MA serves as the location for this retreat.

**Youth Groups**

In any parish community, there are many “groups of youth” including, but not limited to acolytes, religious education teachers and assistants, music ministers, lectors, Eucharistic ministers, CYO, and even groups by name of “youth group.”

Too many times, youth groups are seen as “the” parish total youth ministry program, often separated from formal religious education and sacramental preparation programs. Also, often times, youth groups are seen as the parish labor force for less than challenging manual tasks at parish social functions.

The most genuine purpose of a youth group is to provide a framework for the process of helping youth move from being a community, to a crowd, to a congregation, to the committed and finally to the core.

**Service**

True youth service is modeled after The Great Commission (Matt. 28: 19-20).

However, a parish’s TYM must recognize that the best results come from realizing that there is a progression to serving Christ. One must first know Christ
(fellowship) in order to grow in Christ (discipleship) that allows one to then serve Christ (ministry), and finally share Christ (evangelism).

Also, often times, parishes fail to recognize even the basic aspect that in order to serve, you must first love yourself and then others.

“Let us go to love and serve the Lord and each other!”

**Vibrant Liturgies and Prayer Services**

While maintaining liturgical guidelines established by the Catholic Church and the Diocese of Manchester and preserving the customs and traditions, a parish’s church worship must continue to have a youthful presence and contain youthful elements. A youthful presence would be in the form of young adults serving as Eucharistic Ministers and altar servers as an example; youthful elements would be in the form of short blessings for youth milestones (driver licenses, graduates, athletic seasons, etc.) during Sunday masses, a children’s choir, a young adult contemporary group, liturgical dance, and youth-oriented homilies.

While the concept of a “youth mass” has had some appeal and success in some parishes, creating or setting aside youth-only worship could inadvertently leave out a portion of parishioners (or unchurched) that might find it appealing. Ensuring that the parish consistently has vibrant and Spirit-filled liturgies that appeal to a broader spectrum of worshipers is what is really important.

One thing is for certain - music sets the tone for worship. It can make it or break it. As Rick Warren points out, nowhere else but in church can you sit in 17th-century seats and listen to 19th-century music [Warren, 1995]. Well-played and well-sung contemporary Christian music with contemporary instruments heard through a good sound system is not youth-oriented – it’s simply vibrant, Spirit-filled worship whose appeal is much broader than junior and senior high school youth. Any well-attended mass posted as a “youth” mass is more likely well attended due to the music’s more contemporary nature.
Appendix A

A Petition for Youth Ministry

Response: Hear our prayer.

For us as parents, step-parents, and guardians:

1. To view young adults as integral members of our community - as resources, not liabilities; Lord, in your mercy...

2. To realize that adolescence is a period of preparation for life and not a form of life itself; Lord, in your mercy...

3. To avoid authoritarian or permissive styles of parenting that might badger or embitter our children; Lord, in your mercy...

4. To promote honor and obedience that allows young adults to reason, to think, to ask why; Lord, in your mercy...

5. Knowing that young adults live up to our expectations, may we expect maturity and not trouble; Lord, in your mercy...

For us as young adults:

1. To develop a stance of critical reflection, where we question what is taught, wonder where we are going, and explore different identities; Lord, in your mercy...

2. To refuse to accept ready-made identities of music videos, movies, or TV sitcoms; Lord, in your mercy...

3. To view our parents, step-parents, and guardians in their God-given role as stewards of our lives from whom we can learn from and seek advice, rather that thinking that they don't care or don't understand; Lord, in your mercy...

4. To begin to expand our concern for ourselves to the problems of others, starting first with our families, then with our community, and lastly, the world at large; Lord, in your mercy...

Appendix B

References


Principles of Youth Ministry: A Book of Readings. Center for Youth Ministry Development


