

# Leading Change

To become more effective, parish communities will initiate and support change in the community and in their model for youth ministry. These steps are adapted for a church setting from the work of John Kotter in *Leading Change*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1996) and linked to *Effective Practices in Dynamic Youth Ministry* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2004).

1. **Establishing a Sense of Urgency**
  - Examining the current reality of the pastoral situation
  - Identifying and discussing crises, potential crises, or major opportunities
2. **Creating the Guiding Coalition / Team**
  - Putting together a group with enough power to lead the change
  - Getting the group to work together as a team by building trust
3. **Developing a Vision and Strategy**
  - Creating a vision to help direct the change effort
  - Developing strategies for achieving that vision
4. **Communicating the Vision**
  - Using every vehicle possible to constantly communicate the new vision and strategies
  - Having the guiding coalition role model the behavior expected of the community
5. **Empowering Others to Act on the Vision**
  - Getting rid of obstacles
  - Changing systems or structures that undermine the change vision
  - Encouraging risk taking and nontraditional ideas, activities, and actions
6. **Planning for and Creating Short-Term Wins**
  - Planning for visible improvements, or “wins”
  - Creating those wins
  - Visibly recognizing and rewarding people who made the wins possible
7. **Consolidating Improvements and Producing More Change**
  - Using increased credibility to change all systems, structures, and policies that don't fit together and don't fit the transformational vision
  - Developing people who can implement the change vision
  - Reinvigorating the process with new projects, themes, and change agents
8. **Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture**
  - Creating better ministry through effective leadership and planning
  - Articulating the connections between new behaviors and organizational success
  - Developing means to ensure leadership development and continuity

# 1. Establishing a Sense of Urgency

- ⇒ Examining the current reality of the pastoral situation
- ⇒ Identifying and discussing crises, potential crises, or major opportunities

## *From Leading Change:*

“Establishing a sense of urgency is crucial to gaining needed cooperation. If complacency is high, transformations usually go nowhere because few people are even interested in changing what exists. If urgency is low, it’s difficult to put together a group with enough power and credibility to guide the effort and to create and communicate a change of vision and action” (p. 36).

Never underestimate the magnitude of the forces that reinforce complacency and that help maintain the status quo (p. 42).

## *From Effective Practices for Dynamic Youth Ministry (from Chapter 5, p. 81):*

Effective Practices outlines specific steps for assessing your current situation. They are:

- Assessing your current youth ministry effectiveness – find out your parish’s strengths and weaknesses in terms of qualities, attitudes, specific program elements, and leadership. (Use assessment questions at the end of Chapters 1 through 4.)
- Listen to youth, their parents, parish staff and leadership, including the leaders who work with youth – people are ready and anxious to talk about what is working, what isn’t working, and what they would like to see in the future. Adapt and utilize questions in Appendix 1 that were used in research interviews.

## Strategies to Establish a Sense of Urgency:

- ▶ Initiate an evaluation of current youth ministry efforts that identifies current strengths and weaknesses and identifies youth and families that are not served or that are underserved in the current model.\*
- ▶ Meet with youth and parents of youth who are not involved in youth ministry to identify the challenges of involvement. Ask why they are not currently involved, what they would like to become involved in, and how you can make youth ministry meet their needs better.
- ▶ Host listening sessions in the parish to discuss youth ministry. Include:
  - Youth
  - Parents of youth and grade school age children
  - Current youth ministry leadership
  - Parish leadership and interested parishioners
  - Parish staff
- ▶ Share results of evaluation and listening sessions:
  - Write articles for the bulletin and parish newsletter
  - Meet with parish ministry groups
  - Discuss your current situation with the parish staff and leadership
- ▶ Communicate to the community that change is needed, that more effective ministry is possible, and that there are concrete ways that your parish can move forward.

\* There are a variety of tools within these workshop materials and within the *Effective Practices for Dynamic Youth Ministry* book that could assist you in evaluating your current efforts.

## 2. Creating the Guiding Coalition/Team

- ⇒ Putting together a group with enough power to lead the change
- ⇒ Getting the group to work together as a team by building trust

### *From Leading Change (based upon materials in Chapter 4):*

Because you are likely to meet resistance from unexpected quarters, building a strong guiding coalition or team is essential. There are three keys to creating such alliances.

- *Engaging the right talent.* The most effective team members usually have strong position of power, broad experience, high credibility, and real leadership skill.
- *Growing the coalition/team strategically.* An effective guiding coalition needs a diversity of views and voices. Once a core group coalesces, the challenge is how to expand the scope and complexity of the coalition. It often means working with people from across the whole parish community.
- *Working as a team, not just a collection of individuals.* Leaders often say they have a team when in fact they have a committee or a small hierarchy. The more you do to support team performance, the healthier will be the guiding coalition and the more able it will be to achieve its goals. Real teams are built by doing real work together, sharing a vision, and commitment to a goal.

### *From Effective Practices in Dynamic Youth Ministry (from Chapter 5, p. 81):*

Build a Guiding Coalition. A guiding coalition for youth ministry is a team of people in your parish who have enough authority and commitment to guide the development of more effective youth ministry. A guiding coalition moves the community from an over reliance on one individual leader. This coalition is also not a weak committee that works hard but ultimately has not influence in effecting change. A strong guiding coalition should include parish staff and key leaders as it guides your parish through assessment, visioning, and planning for more effective youth ministry.

Change will not happen if only a few people want it. You must build your coalition, and you have to be strategic in order to make it successful. You will need the support of people of influence at your parish. Consider the following:

- ▶ Make sure that the parish staff is supportive of your efforts. Have at least one staff member serve on your coalition—two if there is a paid Coordinator of Youth Ministry who is leading the effort.
- ▶ Invite people who have influence at the parish—people who have history in the parish, leaders of the parish council, leaders of ministry areas whose support is needed and those that have high visibility.
- ▶ Make sure that your coalition is made up of a variety of people—parents, single people, elders, and youth. The coalition should reflect the diversity in your community.
- ▶ Your coalition will not necessarily work directly with youth—so their ability to chaperone a lock-in is not a deciding factor of their suitability to being part of the coalition. Look for people who are good at visioning, planning, and building support.
- ▶ Invest time in building trust and common vision among the coalition to build a team that works well together.

### 3. Developing a Vision and Strategy

- ⇒ Creating a vision to help direct the change effort
- ⇒ Developing strategies for achieving that vision

#### *From Leading Change (from Chapter 5):*

Vision refers to a picture of the future with some implicit or explicit commentary on why people should strive to create that future. A good vision serves three important purposes. First, by clarifying the general direction for change, it simplifies hundreds of more detailed decisions. Second, it motivates people to take action in the right direction, even if the steps are personally painful or not in people's short term self-interests. Third, it helps coordinate the actions of different people in a remarkably fast and efficient way. Vision helps align individuals for action.

How do you actually build a vision? Because it relates to the future, people assume that vision building should resemble the long-term planning process: design, organize, implement. I have never seen it work that way. Defining a vision of the future does not happen according to a timetable or flowchart. It is more emotional than rational. It demands a tolerance for messiness, ambiguity, and setbacks, an acceptance of the half-step back that usually accompanies every step forward.

#### **Characteristics of an Effective Vision**

*(based upon Leading Change, p. 72):*

- ⇒ **Imaginable:** Conveys a picture of what the future will look like
- ⇒ **Desirable:** Appeals to the long term interests of stakeholders
- ⇒ **Feasible:** Comprises realistic, attainable goals
- ⇒ **Focused:** Is clear enough to provide guidance in decision making
- ⇒ **Flexible:** Is general enough to allow individual initiative
- ⇒ **Communicable:** Is easy to communicate; can be explained successfully within 5 minutes

#### *From Effective Practices for Dynamic Youth Ministry (from Chapter 5, pp. 81-82):*

Effective Practices outlines specific steps towards developing a vision and strategy. They are:

- Have a vision for your parish youth ministry – engage your coalition in naming your parish's vision and goals for youth ministry.
- Invest time and resources – communities need to make youth ministry a pastoral priority – they must invest resources, and give it time to grow.
- Develop of model that fits your parish – don't assume that the model that works for someone else will be right for you.

Creating your vision with your guiding coalition is essential. You must be willing to address your current reality, and build a vision that will give people hope for the future and that will invite people to invest in your vision. You will need to use both "head and heart" to create an effective vision that has an "elegant simplicity" (*Leading Change*, pages 81 and 82). Consider the following:

- ▶ Use *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry*, the United States Catholic Bishop's document on youth ministry as a guide to developing your parish' vision.
- ▶ Use the elements listed in "Elements of a Youth Ministry Program Model" (Chapter 5) as a guide to build your model for parish youth ministry.

## 4. Communicating the Vision

- ⇒ Using every vehicle possible to constantly communicate the new vision and strategies
- ⇒ Having the guiding coalition role model the behavior expected of the community

### *From Leading Change (Adapted from Chapter 6):*

A great vision can serve a useful purpose even if it is understood by just a few key people. But the real power of a vision is unleashed only when most of the people involved in an enterprise or activity have a common understanding of its goals and direction. That shared sense of desirable future can help motivate and coordinate the kinds of actions that create transformations.

### **Key Elements in Effective Communication of Vision**

- **Simplicity:** All jargon and “ministry-speak” must be eliminated
- **Metaphor, analogy, and example:** A verbal picture is worth a thousand words
- **Multiple forums:** Big gatherings and small meetings, bulletins, newsletters, formal and informal interaction – all are effective for spreading the word.
- **Repetition:** Ideas sink in deeply only after they have been heard many times.
- **Leadership by example:** Behavior from important people that is inconsistent with the vision overwhelms other forms of communication.
- **Explanation of seeming inconsistencies:** Unaddressed inconsistencies undermine the credibility of all communication.
- **Give-and-take:** Two-way communication is always more powerful than one-way communication.

Once your guiding coalition has named your vision, make sure that you communicate it to the rest of the parish community. You can't expect people to buy into your vision if you never tell them about it. Make sure that your vision is also communicated by your actions, words, communication tools, and the vibrancy of your ministry. Consider the following:

- ▶ Use *World Youth Day* Sunday or another significant date to highlight your parish mission and ministry with youth. Use bulletin inserts, pulpit announcements, and an after-liturgy reception to share your vision with the parish community.
- ▶ Change what you have to – if you have titles to programs that imply something other than your new reality, change your titles. Don't assume that people will understand an internal change if the external things remain the same.
- ▶ Communicate with ministry groups in the parish and provide easy tools for using this vision when planning for parish ministry. For example, create a poster that hangs in all meeting rooms that names the parish vision for ministry with youth.
- ▶ Become the standard bearers for the new vision for youth ministry – someone is going to have to make sure that your parish community remains true to the new vision in word, action, and planning.

## 5. Empowering Others to Act on the Vision

- ⇒ Getting rid of obstacles
- ⇒ Changing systems or structures that undermine the change vision
- ⇒ Encouraging risk taking and nontraditional ideas, activities, and actions

### *From Leading Change (from Chapter 7):*

Effectively completing stages 1 through 4 of the transformation process already does a great deal to empower people. But even when urgency is high, a guiding coalition has created an appropriate vision, and the vision has been well communicated, numerous obstacles can still stop leaders from creating needed change. The purpose of stage 5 is to empower a broad base of people to take action by removing as many barriers to the implementation of the change vision as possible at this point in the process.

The three major tasks involve:

- Get rid of obstacles to change.
- Change systems or structures that seriously undermine the vision.
- Encourage risk taking and nontraditional ideas, activities, and actions.

### *From Effective Practices for Dynamic Youth Ministry (from Chapter 4, p. 67):*

Training and formation is important for adults working in youth ministry. Adult leaders need to grow in their faith and learn skills for ministry. Effective parishes do not assume that adults automatically will be good at working with youth. Effective coordinators learn the skill of assessing the gifts of their volunteers and then work hard to match them to the right roles. They make sure that the volunteer gets the training and support necessary to succeed at the job they have been given.

The guiding coalition can not do it alone! If the hope is to truly infuse youth ministry throughout the parish, then the whole parish must play a role. Everyone in the parish can welcome youth. Every ministry in the parish can become more inclusive of young people's needs and gifts. By empowering people to act, everyone knows that their efforts are needed, necessary, and important to the over-all effort. Consider the following:

- ▶ Involve parish leaders – help your parish leaders (paid and volunteer) know specific ways that they can support youth ministry at the parish – with time, money, and changes within their ministry efforts.
- ▶ Change what needs changing – people won't be empowered to act if there are too many things standing in their way. Align your parish leadership models to match your new vision.
- ▶ Provide training and presentations for ministry leaders throughout parish life. The parish staff, ushers, choir leaders, catechists, service leaders, and ministry leaders all need to know how to invite, encourage, and bring the best out in young people.
- ▶ Provide training for youth ministry leaders so that they can succeed in their efforts.

## 6. Planning for and Creating Short-Term Wins

- ⇒ Planning for visible improvements, or “wins”
- ⇒ Creating those wins
- ⇒ Visibly recognizing and rewarding people who made the wins possible

### *From Leading Change (from Chapter 8):*

Major change takes time, sometimes lots of time. Zealous believers will often stay the course no matter what happens. Most of the rest expect to see convincing evidence that all the effort is paying off. They want to see clear data indicating that the changes are working and that the change process isn't absorbing so many resources in the short term as to endanger the organization.

A good short-term win has at least these three characteristics:

1. It's visible; large numbers of people can see for themselves whether the result is real or just hype.
2. It's unambiguous; there can be little argument over the call.
3. It's clearly related to the change effort.

Many people will only get behind you once they see that you are succeeding. Purposely plan for some high impact activities that will be seen as “wins” by your community. These “wins” could include the variety of aspects that are part of your vision. For example, one “win” could be a parish event that is led by youth. Another “win” could be a visible way of supporting families of youth. Still another “win” could be a new outreach or gathering of young people. When people see that something new and exciting is happening, they will want to become a part of this change. Consider the following:

- ▶ Know your community – if the most important change your parish is looking for is youth involvement in liturgy, than make that your first priority, if possible. Help people see that the actions and direction of youth ministry connects with their concerns.
- ▶ Build energy – Build activities into your calendar that build energy and enthusiasm for youth ministry. If something will take a long time to be successful, start that too – but give your publicity to those things that have more immediate success.
- ▶ Keep your coalition and staff on board – provide those in leadership positions evidence that transformation is happening, that their efforts are working, and remember to affirm and motivate.
- ▶ Celebrate the successes by communicating what is happening, what aspects of youth ministry are growing. Celebrate the leaders who are making it happen!

## 7. Consolidating Improvements and Producing More Change

- ⇒ Using increased credibility to change all systems, structures, and policies that don't fit together and don't fit the transformational vision
- ⇒ Developing people who can implement the change vision
- ⇒ Reinvigorating the process with new projects, themes, and change agents

### ***From Leading Change (from Chapter 9):***

When a project is completed or an initial goal met, it is tempting to congratulate all involved and proclaim the advent of a new era. While it is important to celebrate results along the way, kidding yourself or others about the difficulty and duration of organizational transformation can be catastrophic. People look forward to completion of any task. The problem is, the results of a change vision are not directly proportional to the effort invested. That is, one-third of your way into a change process, you are unlikely to see one-third of the possible results; you may see only 1/10th of the possible results. If you settle for too little too soon, you will probably lose it all. Celebrating incremental improvements is a great way to mark progress and sustain commitment – but don't forget how much work is still to come.

There is one cardinal rule: *Whenever you let up before the job is done, critical momentum can be lost and regression may follow.*

### ***From Effective Practices in Dynamic Youth Ministry (from Chapter 5, p. 82):***

Effective parishes are guided by their relationship to youth and their families. By knowing young people, they create responsive ministry. Continually evaluate youth ministry programs and strategies based upon what is working in your community. Your evaluation and your vision for youth ministry can inspire innovative ways to serve and include youth.

Evaluation is an essential ingredient in this step. Taking a serious look at what is working and what isn't will give you key insight into what still needs attention, where change has momentum, and where you will need to renew your efforts. Consider the following:

- ▶ Keep changing – use whatever momentum that you can build in the early stages of your change process to fuel the bigger, harder changes that are still in the future.
- ▶ Keep inviting more people to join you – you need as many people as you can get, so don't stop recruiting and training youth and adults for leadership, and reaching out to parish leaders for their support.
- ▶ Use your guiding coalition to continue to set directions.

## 8. Anchoring and Institutionalizing New Approaches in the Culture

- ⇒ Creating better ministry through effective leadership and planning
- ⇒ Articulating the connections between new behaviors and organizational success
- ⇒ Developing means to ensure leadership development and continuity

### *From Leading Change (from Chapter 10):*

Culture is not something that you can manipulate easily. Attempts to grab it and twist it into a new shape never work because you can't grab it. Culture changes only after you have successfully altered people's actions, after the new behavior produces some group benefit for a period of time, and after people see the connection between the new actions and the performance improvement. Thus most cultural change happens in stage 8, not stage 1.

*Culture* refers to norms or behavior and shared values among a group of people. *Norms of behavior* are common or pervasive ways of acting that are found in a group and that persist because group members tend to behave in ways that teach these practices to new members, rewarding those who fit it and sanctioning those who do not. *Shared values* are importance concerns and goals shared by most of the people in a group that tend to shape group behavior and that often persist over time even when group membership changes.

It is easy for parishes (and people) to revert back to old habits. Anyone on a diet knows how hard it is to maintain weight loss, even after achieving initial success. In order to anchor the change in youth ministry into your parish, you will have to persist over a long period of time. Consider the following:

- ▶ Trumpet your successes – your parish culture will change only after it is very clear that the new way is superior to the old way. Make sure people have ways to make this judgment.
- ▶ Don't be afraid of losing people – some people won't like the "new way" and will either self-select themselves out of the ministry or will need to be removed. It is a natural result of change.
- ▶ Develop plans that will create a continuity of leadership – continue to add to your guiding coalition, turning over membership so there are constantly veteran members and new people. Take the time to train and form the new members so that they can continue to guide by the new vision.