

# Planning a Season of Ministry

Parishes with dynamic youth ministry are intentional about planning for their ministry. This tool will help your parish plan a Season of Ministry.

Perhaps one of the most perplexing tasks in youth ministry is devising a year-long schedule of programs, meetings, strategies, activities, and events. How can we possibly ensure that all eight components of youth ministry are attended to in a year? How can we provide for gathered programs with youth and implement non-gathered strategies that deliver ministry to youth? How can we plan to connect youth to the parish and make connections to families of adolescents? By using a seasonal approach to planning, not only can we fill in that calendar, we can be creative as well! The seasonal approach provides for year round ministry with youth by breaking up the year into four seasons – fall, winter, spring, and summer – that each have three months. Thinking about these seasons helps us connect with the Church liturgical year and seasonal school activities and holidays that are an important part of the lives of youth and their families.

## How to Plan:

The following is a step-by-step process that can be used to help a group of leaders (youth and adults) plan a Season of Ministry. You will need the following supplies:

- ▶ Newsprint
- ▶ Markers
- ▶ Calendars for the three months you are planning – preferably large calendars that you can post on the wall. If there is specific information that will be helpful to the planning team (i.e., homecoming weekend, spring break, Halloween, etc.), mark those events at the bottom of the calendar box for that specific date.
- ▶ Calendar of parish events and calendars from the schools that the young people of the parish attend.
- ▶ Post-it® notes
- ▶ Highlighter

If your parish's planning team is not familiar with *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* (USCCB, 1997), use "Renewing the Vision" handouts (pages 3-5) to provide some background and education to your team prior to beginning your planning process. They will need to have a working knowledge of the three goals of youth ministry and the eight components to plan most effectively. You will also want to talk about how programming should be "Flexible and Adaptable" (see p. 4).

If you have good youth ministry resources at the parish (Youth Ministry Access subscription, *Total Youth Ministry Manuals*, catechetical programs, etc.), prepare for the

planning meeting by selecting particular programs or strategies that would be appropriate for the season that you are planning. Place the program/strategy titles and short descriptions on Post-it® notes for use by the planning group. If possible, make a set of Post-it® notes for every three participants.

**Step 1:** Distribute “Seasonal Considerations in Planning,” to each person. Looking at the season for which you are planning, ask the team to circle the events or connections they believe should be addressed during that season, and add anything to the list that should be there. This may include the parish’s patron saint celebration, traditions of your youth ministry, a civic event, or major school programs and events. Give a minute for this to be done individually.

Ask the team to share what items they circled on the worksheet and added to the list. Write those items on a blank sheet of newsprint. Place a check mark next to those items that are mentioned more than once. As a team, talk about any common themes or focuses that you will have for the season (i.e., fall – welcoming and transitions; spring – justice theme for Lent, etc.).

**Step 2:** Ask the team to work in groups of two or three people. Invite each group to talk about programs that they believe would be effective and appropriate during that particular season, drawing connections to the activities, celebrations, and events listed in the previous step. This list might also include “youth ministry traditions” that happen during this season. Give the groups five minutes to brainstorm. (If you have previously prepared index cards with program ideas, give each group a set of the cards. They should use these as possible options for programs within their group work.)

Distribute “Comprehensive Youth Ministry” to each team. Ask the groups to take another five minutes to review the goals and each of the components, and add any additional ideas to their lists that match with particular components that they have previously missed. (It isn’t essential that they have an idea for each of the components.)

If your parish has a seasonal or yearly theme, or a mission statement, ask each group to also brainstorm programs and strategies that will reflect the theme and mission of your ministry. Allow a few minutes for this additional step.

Re-gather the team, and invite each group to report on their work. Collect the program ideas and strategies on newsprint (including the programs selected from the distributed Post-it® notes). If the event is connected with the specific date or event, include that information. Once all groups have reported, give the group a moment to look over the list, and add to it anything that seems to be missing.

Not every brainstormed activity must be designed for “everyone.” Some programs, events, and strategies may be directed at a specific segment of the youth population (i.e., a retreat

for incoming freshmen or graduating seniors). If the group has not brainstormed ideas for these “niche” groups, invite them to add anything to the newsprints that will help round-out your offerings. At this point in the process, you will have many more ideas than you will be able to use.

**Step 3:** Give each member of the team a marker, and invite them to select the 10 programs or strategies that they believe will be most effective during this season. If you only offer a few programs a month, you might want to reduce this number to 5. After everyone has marked their choices, engage the team in discerning some key programs or strategies that they wish to be a part of the season. Write each of these programs/strategies on a Post-it® note.

**Step 4:** Post the three calendars on a wall that everyone in the group can see. If you already have a pattern of regularly meeting with youth (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly), highlight those dates. On the appropriate dates on the calendar, write in the programs, activities, and events that are already scheduled commitments (i.e., a retreat). This serves as a starting point for your planning.

**Step 5:** Invite team members to work with you to place the Post-it® notes on appropriate days on the calendar. If you have a regularly scheduled youth gathering time, begin with these dates, deciding on the program focus for your gatherings, and then extending out to other programs that you wish to offer. Write non-gathered strategies on the month when they will take place (or on a specific date, if appropriate).

**Step 6:** Review each month with the team. If there is too much or too little on a particular month, or throughout the whole season, make any adjustments needed.

**Step 7:** As a team, review and evaluate your plan for this season and your calendar.

- Does this season match with our purpose and goals for youth ministry? Does it address a variety of the components of youth ministry?
- Does the plan for this season provide for a good balance of gathered and non-gathered programs and strategies?
- Does this season consider the lives of youth and their families during these months?
- Does this season include parish and community activities?

Make adjustments as needed based upon your observations. With these plans in place, you can work on developing the specifics for each program/strategy and developing leadership for these events.

Where once you may have been overwhelmed with trying to develop a comprehensive ministry for young people in your parish, you have accomplished just that for an upcoming season of ministry!

# Seasonal Considerations in Planning

## FALL (September/October/November)

### What the Church is celebrating:

- ▶ Ordinary Time
- ▶ Birth of the Virgin Mary (September 8)
- ▶ Catechetical Sunday (third Sunday in September)
- ▶ Respect Life Sunday
- ▶ World Youth Day (30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time)
- ▶ All Saints Day (Nov. 1)
- ▶ All Souls Day (Nov. 2)
- ▶ Christ the King
- ▶ Advent

### Holidays:

- ▶ Labor Day (first Monday in September)
- ▶ Columbus Day
- ▶ Halloween
- ▶ Veterans Day (November 11)
- ▶ Thanksgiving (fourth Thursday in November)

### School Connection(s):

- ▶ Back-to-school activities
- ▶ Homecoming
- ▶ Sports
- ▶ Youth newsletter
- ▶ Birthday cards
- ▶ Meet administration at local high school(s)

## WINTER (December/January/February)

### What the Church is celebrating:

- ▶ Advent
- ▶ Immaculate Conception (December 8)
- ▶ Our Lady of Guadalupe (December 12)
- ▶ Christmas
- ▶ Mary, Mother of God (January 1)
- ▶ Epiphany
- ▶ Ordinary Time
- ▶ Presentation of the Lord

### Holidays:

- ▶ Winter break
- ▶ New Year's Day
- ▶ Martin Luther King, Jr. (third Monday in January)
- ▶ Valentine's Day
- ▶ Presidents' Day (third Monday in February)

### School Connection(s):

- ▶ Sports
- ▶ Mid-term exams

## **SPRING (March/April/May)**

### **What the Church is celebrating:**

- ▶ Ash Wednesday
- ▶ Lent
- ▶ St. Patrick's Day (March 17)
- ▶ St. Joseph (March 19)
- ▶ Annunciation of the Lord (March 25)
- ▶ Palm Sunday
- ▶ Triduum
- ▶ Easter
- ▶ Ascension (last Thursday in May)

### **Holidays:**

- ▶ Mother's Day
- ▶ Memorial Day (fourth Monday in May)

### **School Connections:**

- ▶ Spring break
- ▶ Final exams
- ▶ Baccalaureate
- ▶ Graduation
- ▶ Prom

## **SUMMER (June/July/August)**

### **What the Church is celebrating:**

- ▶ Pentecost
- ▶ Most Holy Trinity
- ▶ Corpus Christi
- ▶ Ordinary Time
- ▶ Feast of the Assumption (August 15)

### **Holidays:**

- ▶ Father's Day
- ▶ Independence Day (July 4)

### **School Connections:**

- ▶ Baccalaureate
- ▶ Graduation
- ▶ Summer school
- ▶ Sports camps
- ▶ Band camps
- ▶ Back-to-school