

Research Process

For the National Symposium on Effective Youth Ministry Practices in Catholic Parishes Project

The National Symposium on Effective Youth Ministry Practices in Catholic Parishes was designed to help parishes strengthen their youth ministry. We had two kinds of parishes in mind as we developed this project. The first is a parish that has no identifiable youth ministry. The second is a parish that has some youth ministry and wants to develop a stronger, more effective approach. To help these parishes, we want to provide guidance through sharing the hands-on experience of parishes that have developed effective youth ministry. What we want to do is put the parishes that want to create or strengthen their youth ministry “in the room” with parishes that are engaged in effective, dynamic ministry with adolescents. This interaction would give parishes who are seeking guidance, models to emulate, characteristics to nurture, and practices to adapt.

To research effective youth ministry practices in Catholic parishes, the research team utilized a qualitative research method. In their book, *Beginning Qualitative Research*, our consultants for this project, Pam Maykut and Richard Morehouse describe this research method as follows: Qualitative research is a “research model that is primarily exploratory and descriptive, and for which people’s words and actions are the main sources of data.” To stay focused on this mission, we made some choices about the research process and methods. Our first decision was to focus upon parish youth ministry. Youth Ministry takes place in Catholic High Schools, youth centers, youth movements, diocesan programs, retreat programs and national or international youth events as well as parishes.¹ We chose to focus this project on the practices of youth ministry that are most effective within parish ministry to youth. Within this parish focus, we also chose to study practices. Practices include a wide variety of behaviors, attitudes and disciplines. A practice is a behavior or pattern of acting that has within it personal and communal values, beliefs, and convictions. In other words, practices are beliefs that take flesh in our actions and choices. A focus on practices means that we asked parishes to tell us what they do with youth and to describe the “practice” of how youth are part of parish life.

Another decision that we made was to focus upon *best* practices. The Symposium Project is not trying to portray a “state of the ministry” or a portrait of what is typically happening in parishes. We have specifically designed the research to study effective practices because we think that this will be most helpful to parishes that are seeking to strengthen their ministry. We went looking for parishes that had been identified as having effective youth ministry in place. We did not define “effective” because we wanted to be very careful not to limit the sample of parishes to those that fit any predetermined ideas about effectiveness.

¹ See *Renewing the Vision – A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) 1997, pages 11-13.

Instead, we identified the sites based upon various diversity factors and we let the sites choose adult leaders, youth and parish staffs from communities that the local diocesan director and staff considered to be doing effective youth ministry.

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To hear about and experience effective practices in these parishes, we conducted 49 interviews in 13 sites across the United States. Some of these sites were a single diocese and some represented a regional cluster of dioceses. These sites were chosen based upon the following factors:

- *Geographical diversity – A representation of regions across the nation*
- *Availability of diversity of urban, suburban and rural parishes.*

Within each site, we planned to interview leaders from 8 to 10 parishes. This would include a group interview with adult leaders from each of the parishes, a group interview with youth from each of the parishes, and on-site interviews at two of the parishes, chosen from among the 8 – 10 selected parishes. The on-site group interviews would be for parish staffs. The sites were instructed to select parishes with effective youth ministry.

One of the things you may notice is that we chose the term “Adult Leader in Youth Ministry.” We assumed that many of the people who would be in the interviews would be Coordinators of Youth Ministry. However, we were concerned about roles, titles, and people’s perceptions of credibility based on position. The criteria for being part of the interview were simple: the person should be an adult and should have over one year of experience in working with youth in the parish. We identified this group as “Adult Leaders” rather than just “Leader” because many of the youth we interviewed were leaders as well.

The following are the instructions that were given to diocesan leaders to select parishes: (*portions taken from correspondence to site hosts, October 19, 2001.*)

Selecting Adult Leaders

The most important criterion for selecting leaders is to choose parishes (and their adult and youth leaders) who are engaged in an effective youth ministry. The project is trying to discover and hear more about effective practices in youth ministry. Please choose leaders who you believe can speak knowledgeably about practices and strategies of ministry with youth that are effective in achieving the goals and aims of youth ministry. The adult leaders should have more than one year of youth ministry experience. The following diversity factors are also helpful in choosing adult leaders:

- *Diversity of urban, suburban and rural*
- *Ethnic and racial diversity*

- *Diversity in styles and methods of youth ministry*
- *Diversity of leadership: full-time paid, part-time paid and volunteer coordinators of youth ministry*

Selecting Youth Leaders

Youth that are part of the group interview should be in high school and should be familiar with the youth ministry in their parish. They do not necessarily need to be leadership youth, but they should have experiences of youth ministry that they can talk about. Each adult should bring one or two youth with them for the group interview. We are looking for a total of 10 to 12 youth.

Selecting Parish Staffs

From your confirmed list of adult leaders, choose two leaders for on-site interviews with parish staff. In choosing these parishes, you will be looking for a setting where the parish staff is familiar with youth ministry and would be supportive of this study. Try to select two parishes that are different from each other in terms of style of ministry and setting: urban, suburban, or rural.

From these instructions, diocesan hosts selected the 96 parishes who participated in the interviews. Each host used the criteria and diversity guidelines to select parishes that would reflect the richness of youth ministry experience in their area. They also carefully chose two parishes from among their group of 8 to 10 to participate in on-site interviews. This attention from the hosts was very important in providing for rich and diverse conversations. In particular, the hosts in the larger urban areas were attentive to including parishes that minister primarily to Hispanic or African American youth for inclusion in the group interviews and the parish staff interviews.

Putting People in the Room

At one of the parish interviews, I was hearing the parish staff describe effective youth ministry as second nature, almost as though it was a recipe handed down to them by their ancestors. It was so natural to them, they had to stop and think about what they do and why anyone would think it would be interesting; they had to stop to actually consider what the “ingredients” were and how it all comes together. In the midst of this conversation, I began to think about a particular parish in my area that wants to have effective youth ministry. I was wishing that the leaders of that parish could just be in the room with these leaders and pick up on their enthusiasm, the depth of their convictions and their rich stories of how they make youth integral to the parish community. That is what this process is all about. As I said earlier, it is about putting people “in the room” with leaders who are part of dynamic, effective youth ministry.

Research Method Factors

1. Focus of Inquiry

The focus of inquiry for this process was the following statement:

We want to understand more about the experiences and views of youth, adult ministers and parish staff on youth ministry.

By understanding these views, we were hoping to be able to identify the practices that lead to effective ministry, the factors in place in parishes where youth ministry is effective and the support that is needed to help parishes become more effective.

2. Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy that we employed was a combination of two purposeful sampling strategies.

Intensity Sampling also referred to as a “best practices” nomination approach.

*Purpose: Information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely, but not extremely, such as good students/poor students, above average/below average.*²

In our case the intensity sampling was determined by focusing on parishes identified as having “effective youth ministry.”

And

Maximum Variation Sampling

*Purpose: Documents unique or diverse variations that have emerged in adapting to different conditions. Identifies important common patterns that cut across variations.*³

For this project, the maximum variation sampling occurred as a result of the intended diversity factors that are listed above.

3. Resulting Sample Characteristics

There were a total of 96 parishes who participated in the interviews.

Table 3.1 Regional Diversity

Regional Makeup for the 13 sites

<u>Sites</u>	<u>Region</u>
3	Northeast and Mid-Atlantic
3	Midwest
2	Southeast
1	Texas

² Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (2nd Edition). Newbury Park, CA: Sage. Table 5.5 Sampling Strategies.

³ Ibid.

2	Mountain States
2	West Coast

Time Zone Makeup for the 13 sites

<u>Time Zone</u>	<u># of Sites</u>
EST	5
CST	4
MST	2
PST	2

Table 3.2 Parish Information

Demographics

- 18 parishes described themselves as Rural
- 47 parishes described themselves as Suburban
- 24 parishes described themselves as Urban
- 7 parishes were un-described

Average Income of Families in Parishes

<u># of Parishes</u>	<u>Income</u>
8	\$15,000 to \$25,000
22	\$26,000 to \$36,000
17	\$37,000 to \$47,000
20	\$48,000 to \$60,000
13	over \$60,000
16	income not reported

Parish Size

Parishes ranged in size from 125 families to 6200 families.

<u># of Parishes</u>	<u># of Families</u>
9	125 to 349
12	350 to 999
11	1000 to 1499
12	1500 to 1999
19	2000 to 2999
14	3000 +
19	did not report

Number of Volunteers in Youth Ministry in Parish

<u># of Parishes</u>	<u># of Volunteers involved in youth ministry</u>
4	no volunteers
19	1- 10
11	11- 20
5	21-30
11	had 30 or more
46	did not report

Staff for Youth Ministry in Parish

<u># of Full-Time positions</u>	<u># of Parishes</u>
0	31
1	29
2	18
3	2
4	3
more than 7	1
did not report	12

Table 3.3 Youth who were Interviewed

Total number of youth interviewed was 140.

<i>Age of Youth</i>	
<u>Youth</u>	<u>Ages</u>
1	14
17	15
32	16
58	17
23	18
4	19
5	did not report

<i>Gender</i>	
91	Female
49	Male

<i>Ethnicity of Youth</i>	
<u>Youth</u>	<u>Ethnic Identification</u>
10	African American
3	Asian American
100	European American
12	Latino
3	Native American
11	other
8	not reporting ethnicity

<i>Schools Attended by Youth</i>	
<u>Youth</u>	<u>Type of School</u>
30	Catholic School
4	other private school
98	Public School
2	other
8	did not report

Table 3.4 Adults who were Interviewed

The total number of adults interviewed as part of the adult leader interviews and the parish staff interviews was 232.

Gender

133	Female
82	Males
17	did not report

Ethnicity of Adults

<u>Adults</u>	<u>Ethnic Identification</u>
4	African American
1	Asian American
105	European American
5	Latino
5	Native American
2	other
110	not reporting ethnicity

4. Method of Data Collection

Interview Guides (see appendix 1)

The interview guides were designed by the research team in conjunction with the research consultants. Each guide was designed for the particular constituency to help us understand youth ministry practices in these communities. One thing that you may notice is that the parish staff and adult guides are very similar, while the youth guide has some distinctive questions. This is because we were choosing questions to ask the youth that would give us “insider” information from young people about youth ministry.

Research Team Training

The Executive Committee/Research team received training in Qualitative Research methods, including interview techniques and strategies. As part of the training the team observed the first group interviews with adult leaders and youth, which were conducted by the Research consultants. The research team was also given articles and chapters to read that describe Qualitative Research method. The first two interviews were video-taped as well as audio-taped. These tapes served as a helpful part of the team preparation.

Group Interviews

From the sites that we selected, we ended up completing 49 group interviews:

13 Groups of Adult Leaders in Youth Ministry

13	Groups of Youth
23	Parish Staff Interviews

These interviews were conducted by the Executive Committee/Research team. For each of the interviews, members of the research team were sent off in pairs, one man and one woman. Each pair conducted the interviews for two sites in one trip. For the Adult and Youth Group interviews, the two groups were gathered together for hospitality, introductions and prayer. When the groups were divided, one interviewer went with each group. Each group answered the questions as provided in the interview guide for that constituency (youth or adult leader.) The interviews lasted between 90 – 120 minutes in length. Each interview was tape-recorded and the sessions began with participants providing permission to be taped and assuming an alias for the interview time to protect their privacy.

The Parish Staff interviews were similar, although sometimes, by necessity, they were shorter. For the Parish Staff interview, the interviewers divided up and each interviewer went on site at a different parish. For a typical interview, the adult leader that had participated in the group interview the night before introduced the interviewer to the parish staff. The adult leader did not usually participate in the interview since they had already provided their input. Additionally, the adult did not participate so that the parish staff wouldn't over rely upon the "youth minister" to answer the questions and so that the staff would speak freely about youth ministry in the parish. For the parish staff interviews, there were a variety of participants. Parishes were asked to invite the pastor and any staff who would be knowledgeable about youth ministry. Many of the parishes involved persons in administrative positions, such as bookkeepers or office managers, who were also parents of youth to bring that voice to the conversation (see appendix 3 for role descriptions of adults who were interviewed.) Following the parish staff interview, the interviewer usually met with the adult leader for a brief meeting and tour of the facilities. In many of the sites, the interviewer continued the interview with specific follow-up questions for the adult leader related to comments heard in the parish staff interview.

5. Preparation for Data Analysis

Each of the 49 interviews was transcribed from the tapes to a written transcript. These transcripts formed the basis of the research compilation. The full transcripts were coded to identify the group interview site and group. These transcripts were then duplicated for the data analysis. To prepare for the data analysis, each member of the interview team read the transcripts of the interviews that she/he conducted.

6. Data Analysis

To analyze the data, the research team “unitized” the data (isolating parts of the transcripts from which a particular theme or topic emerged.) The research team divided into three teams to analyze the data: Youth, Adult Leaders and Parish Staff. Each team read all of the transcripts for their constituency and then began the process of sorting the data and arriving at the outcomes or findings. Throughout the process of data analysis we worked to stay close to the data so that we truly honored and respected the voices of the people we interviewed. We also stayed focus on being helpful to the parishes we are seeking to serve through this process.

Each team worked with the findings and the quotations to determine the “Key Findings.” This process included examining the prominence of factors within the transcripts as well as the importance and salience of the findings as they related to our focus of inquiry. The teams worked to identify the most important findings and then to identify other findings that were related to or supportive of these key findings. Additional findings that were not related to the “Key Findings” were left to stand on their own.

All together there were 121 findings:

- 40 Youth Findings
- 40 Adult Leader Findings
- 41 Parish Staff Findings

One of the things we noticed about the findings is that the three constituency groups all spoke about the same reality with their own perspective in tact. There was a lot of convergence between and among the three groups, but there were differences in emphasis. Similar to a musical piece within which a theme is repeated; something that was a major theme for one group, often showed up as an important theme with another and as a minor theme with the remaining group.

There seems to be more convergence than divergence among the findings: we described it as three different views of the same mountain from three sides. It was not like the story of the blind men describing the elephant where each describes its part as the whole; in this case all three groups had a sense of the whole conversation, but in expressing what they felt was important, they kept their voice and their perspective.

Among the 121 findings there were common themes and even recurring statements. We identified 16 themes that emerged across the constituencies. These 16 include all of the key findings and include most of the other findings in the research. For most of the 16, there was a key finding from each group, for some there was a key finding in one or two groups and related findings within the other groups. In identifying these themes and putting them next to each other, the research team is not indicating that the finding says the same thing; what we noticed was that the three groups all made mention of the same subject and very often, all three groups expressed these topics as important.

Themes: (See Appendix 2 for the List of Themes and Findings.)

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Liturgy | 9. Youth Leadership |
| 2. Role of Family and Parents | 10. Parish Support of Youth / Youth Ministry |
| 3. Coordinator of Youth Ministry | 11. Extended Programs |
| 4. Retreats | 12. Service |
| 5. Communities of Youth | 13. Adult who Work with Youth |
| 6. Faith Formation | 14. Youth in the Life of the Parish |
| 7. Youth Ministry is Inclusive / Responsive / Balanced / Varied | 15. Impact of Youth Ministry |
| 8. Youth as Witness | 16. Meeting Youth Where They Are / Connecting Faith to Real Life |

7. Provisions for Trustworthiness

The following were identified as the provisions for trustworthiness utilized within this research process:

- Detailed description of the research process and outcomes
- Using a Team process
- Including Peer de-briefers – (Research consultants)
- Development of audit trail – Coding of data so that information can be traced back to original interview transcript

Appendices:

1. Interview Guides for Symposium Research Project
2. Themes with Findings

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Funding for this project has been provided through the sponsoring agencies and the following foundations:

- The Louisville Institute,
- An anonymous Catholic foundation, and
- The National Foundation for Catholic Youth

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Appendix 1: Interview Guides for Symposium Research Project

Adult Interview Questions

- What is youth ministry in your parish?
- You've all been involved for some time with youth ministry. Tell us about a really meaningful experience.
- In youth ministry at your parish, what's worked?
 - Groups, activities, events, relationships
 - How do you know it's worked?
- What hasn't worked?
 - How do you know it hasn't worked?
- What are the features of a healthy, thriving youth ministry?
 - What helps this happen?
 - What are the barriers to this?
- (Two options for closing question)
 - How has your involvement in youth ministry helped you to grow in your relationship with God? OR
 - What gives you hope?

Youth Interview Questions

- What is youth Ministry in your parish?
- Tell us about an experience of being involved in youth ministry that was really meaningful to you.
- Tell us about an experience that has helped you grow in your relationship to God.
- In youth ministry at your parish, what's worked?
 - (Groups, activities, events, relationships)
 - How do you know it's worked?
- In any parish, some youth choose to participate in youth ministry and some don't. When youth choose not to get involved in youth ministry, why do you think they make that choice?
- What makes for a really good youth ministry?
 - What helps this happen?
 - What gets in the way?
- What gives you hope?

Appendix 1 (continued)

Parish Staff Interview Questions

- What is youth ministry in your parish?
- You are all involved in this parish in a variety of ways and you see the interactions between youth and the parish from different perspectives. Tell us about a meaningful experience of youth being involved in ministry in your community.
- In youth ministry at your parish, what's worked?
 - Groups, activities, events, relationships
 - How do you know it's worked?
- What hasn't worked?
 - How do you know it hasn't worked?
- What are the features of a healthy, thriving youth ministry?
 - What helps this happen?
 - What are the barriers to this?
- What gives you hope?

On-Site Parish Observation:

While on site at the parish, tour the facilities and note evidence of youth involvement in parish life.

Collect information from the parish and the youth ministry program that provides insight into the relationship of youth within the parish:

- Parish Bulletin
- Parish Brochure
- Youth Ministry Newsletter
- Calendar of Activities
- Program Brochures
- Leadership Listings
- Flyers or publicity describing upcoming events

Themes with Findings

Liturgy

Y 1
 AL 11
 PS 3.1
 Y 1.1
 PS 3.2

Role of Family and Parents

PS 9
 A 2
 Y 11
 PS 9.1
 A 2.1
 A 2.2
 Y 11.1

Coordinator of Youth Ministry

A 4
 PS 4
 Y 10.1
 A 4.1
 A 4.2
 A 4.3
 A 4.4
 A 4.5
 PS 4.1
 PS 4.2
 PS 4.3

Retreats

Y 2
 A 5
 PS 15
 Y 2.1
 Y 2.2
 A 5.1

Communities of Youth

A 8
 Y 5.2
 Y 5.3
 PS 13
 Y 5.1
 PS 2.2
 Y 5.4
 A 8.1
 A 8.2
 A 8.3

Faith Formation

A 10
 PS 5
 Y 13
 PS 5.1
 PS 5.2
 Y 8
 Y 8.1
 Y 8.3
 Y 9

Youth Ministry is Inclusive / Responsive / Balanced / Varied

A 19
 PS 12
 Y 7
 PS 11
 Y 7.1
 PS 11.1
 PS 2.2
 Y 7.2
 A 19

Youth as Witness

A 1.3
 PS 3.1
 Y 2.3
 Y 8.1

Themes with Findings – Appendix 2 (continued)

Youth Leadership

A 1
 PS 6

Y 4
 A 1.1
 PS 6.1
 A 1.2
 PS 6.2
 Y 4.1
 Y 4.2
 Y 4.3
 Y 4.4
 Y 4.5

Parish Support of Youth / Youth Ministry

PS 1
 Y 6
 A 3
 PS 1.1
 PS 3
 Y 6.2
 A 3.2
 PS 1.2
 A 3.2
 PS 1.3
 PS 1.4

Extended Programs

A 5
 PS 15
 Y 9.1

Service

Y 3
 A 5.2
 PS 8
 Y 3.1
 PS 8.1
 Y 3.2
 PS 8.2

Adult who Work with Youth

A 9
 PS 10
 Y 10.2
 A 9.1
 Y 12
 A 9.2
 PS 10.1

Youth in the Life of the Parish

PS 2
 A 12
 Y 6.2
 PS 3
 PS 2.1
 A 12.1
 A 19

Impact of Youth Ministry

PS 7
 A 6
 Y 8.2
 Y 5.2
 PS 7.1
 Y 6.1
 A 6.1
 PS 7.2
 A 7
 A 17
 A 18

Meeting Youth Where They Are / Connecting Faith to Real Life

Y 8
 A 16
 Y 8.3
 PS 12
 Y 13