

Assessing Youth Ministry in your Parish

Do you have a youth ministry program in your parish (a program for middle school and/or high school students)? If so, how well are you doing? If not, what are you considering? What is your goal or outcome hopes for youth ministry? How much energy and what level of commitment do the people in your parish have for this ministry? What are your resources? The following is intended to help you assess youth ministry in your parish, and help you as you look and plan for the future.

The goals for youth programs in churches range from baby-sitting to indoctrination, and usually are somewhere in between or even contain a more subtle part of both sides. One way we propose looking at your goals is by using some of the tools used in the Exemplary Youth Ministry Study done in 2003. The following is from their website <http://www.firstthird.org/eym/>.

The Exemplary Youth Ministry Study was a national study of congregations in seven denominations funded by the Lilly Foundation and completed in 2003. This site is dedicated to share its learnings and encourage the practice of exemplary youth ministry in every church.

THE EYM STUDY ASKED:

- Why do some Christian young people mature in faith and become devoted disciples of Jesus Christ when many don't?
- How might congregations and their ministries factor into the faith maturity and devotion in these adolescents?
- Do congregations with high percentages of committed Christian youth exist?
- If so, What's going on in these congregations that might be contributing to vital faith in young people?
- Might there be a positive relationship between the ministries of these congregations and the Christian faith of their young people?
- Might congregations with effective ministries with devoted Christian youth have anything in common with each other? If common elements of effective ministries with youth of vital faith exist, can these common elements be transferred to other congregations?

They based their research on an idea of Mature Christian Faith, define thusly (to see a more indepth definition, please go here: <http://www.firstthird.org/eym/Characteristics-of-Mature-Christian-Youth.pdf>)

A Mature Christian Young Person. . .

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seeks Spiritual Growth | <input type="checkbox"/> Possesses a Vital Faith |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Practices Faith | <input type="checkbox"/> Makes the Christian Faith a Way of Life |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lives a Life of Service | <input type="checkbox"/> Reaches Out to Others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exercises Moral Responsibility | <input type="checkbox"/> Speaks Publicly about Faith |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Possesses a Positive Spirit | |

In their study, they found specific characteristics that parishes who had the highest level of mature Christian youth share. (Go here for more info: <http://www.firstthird.org/eym/Faith-Outcomes-Assets.pdf>)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faith Maturity | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth Minister Strength |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pastoral Leadership Strength | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth and Adult Leadership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Congregational Characteristics | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth Ministry Effectiveness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Youth Involvement | <input type="checkbox"/> Family Involvement |

How does your parish view their communities' impact on young people?

The study found that parishes that a faith community can have a strong impact on the faith and lives of young people “when churches set their minds to fully enfranchise young people in their life and work. When pastors, congregational leaders, parents, and adult youth leaders work together to promote real commitment to young people as full members of the body of Christ and carry that commitment across the life and mission of the entire congregations, teenagers mature in faith and grow to respect and love their church... If a congregation is not willing to make this commitment, youth and youth ministry will always be tangential and second rate. Congregational commitment to young people is essential for an effective ministry with youth.” (The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry p.52)

The following two reflection tools are the basis of this study, and your parish can use them to gain a general overview of how people see the impact of youth ministry within your church.

- Faith Assessment Tool for the Congregation and Youth Ministry:
<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/Faith-Assets-Assessment-Tool.pdf>
- Characteristics of Mature Christian Youth: A Reflection Tool:
<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/Mature-Christian-Youth-Reflection-Tool.pdf>
- The Faith Assets Framework (Application Tool 20):
<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-20-The-Faith-Assests-Framework.pdf>

What are your parish's assets, and how can you better utilize them to have more impact on the youth in your community?

It is said that God has given us all that we need. However, it's our job to use it to the best advantage. What assets do you have in your parish that you aren't fully utilizing? These are probably best studied by a small dedicate group of diverse people from your parish.

Getting the Basics

Application Tool 1

Faith Assets Assessment

*The Faith Assets can provide a common language to involve all members of the congregation in discovering their role in the lives of young people. Use this assessment tool to reflect on the priority and practice of the Forty-Four Faith Assets in the life of your congregation and youth ministry. The Assessment Tool can be used with church staff, key leadership, and leadership councils to conduct an overall assessment of the congregation's impact on young people. It can be used by the youth ministry team, as well church staff and key leaders, to assess the effectiveness of the youth ministry effort. This tool is best used in group settings where there can be discussion and shared analysis. Begin by giving people time to complete the assessment individually. Then, use the following process to share reflections and analysis, and plan for improvement in each of the four asset groupings. (From *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry* p.68)*

<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-1-FaithAssets-Assessment1.pdf>

Application Tool 2

Identifying Your Church's Culture

*Begin by analyzing your church's culture through the eyes of an outsider. Imagine that in the last month people from your community participated in your church's worship services, sat in on church programs, met several core people, and learned a bit of the history of your church. The goal in this first set of questions is to describe your church's invisible cultural "megaphone" as it is perceived by an observer. (From *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry* p.76)*

<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-2-Identifying-Your-Churchs-Culture.pdf>

Application Tool 3

Investigating the Life of a Congregation

The first area of investigation focuses on the theological commitments of the congregation. This set of questions enable congregational leaders to delve deeply into the core beliefs, language, and actions that define the congregations' theology, mission and vision.

The second area of investigation focuses on the qualities of the congregation and ministry. This set of questions enables congregational leaders to delve deeply into the manner in which the people and congregation value youth ministry, the quality of their relationships, and the commitment and competence of their leadership.

The third area of investigation focuses on the contextualized ministry practices of the congregation. This set of questions enables congregational leaders to delve deeply into the particular ministry activities in each setting, with attention given to the way these activities have been adapted to their context and integrated with each other.

*(From *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry* pp.79-80)*

<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-3-Investigating-the-Life-of-a-Congregation.pdf>

Congregational Faith and Qualities

What kind of congregational faith and life nurtures youth of maturing Christian faith? A Surprising discovery emerges from the findings of the EYM Study – the entire congregation makes a difference in youth ministry... The study found two distinct features of congregational life that directly influences the development of a vital Christian faith in young people: the theological commitments of the congregations (congregational faith) and the quality of community life within the congregation (congregational qualities). (From The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry pp.83)

Congregational Faith Assets

Experiences God's Living Presence: The congregation possesses a sense of God's living presence in community, at worship, through study, and in service.

Makes Faith Central: The congregation recognizes and participates in God's sustaining and transforming life and work.

Emphasizes Prayer: The congregation practices the presence of God as individuals and community through prayer and worship.

Focuses on Discipleship: The congregation is committed to knowing and following Jesus Christ.

Emphasizes Scripture: The congregation values the authority of Scripture in its life and mission.

Makes Mission Central: The congregation consistently witnesses, serves and promotes moral responsibility, and seeks justice.

(From The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry p. 58-59 – see the book for more specific information and examples.)

Application Tools

Application Tool 4

Evaluating Faith Assets: Congregational Faith

<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-4-Evaluating-Faith-Assets-Congregational-Faith.pdf>

Application Tool 5

Evaluating Faith Assets: Congregational Qualities

<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-5-Evaluating-Faith-Assets-Congregational-Qualities.pdf>

Integrating Young People – and Intergenerational Church

There is no one way to connect youth with the whole church community. Each congregation is a very specific community with its own unique identity, history, traditions, people, and geography. Customize these ideas for your community. Use them to spark your own creativity. There are many ways to build a youth-friendly and youth-involving congregation.

- Build a youth-friendly congregation culture where young people are valued and intentionally included in all of congregational life.
- Infuse intergenerational relationships, and programming into the existing youth ministry program and activities.
- Incorporate youth into the ministries and leadership roles of the congregations.
- Create models of intergenerational programming for all the generations in the congregation.

(From *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry* pp.119-122 – see the book for more specific information and examples.)

Congregational Qualities and Assets

Supports Youth Ministry: Youth and ministry with young people are high priorities for the congregation.

Demonstrates Hospitality: The congregation values and welcomes all people, especially youth.

Strives for Excellence: The congregation sets high standards, evaluates, and engages in continuous improvement.

Encourages Thinking: The congregation welcomes questions and reflection on faith and life.

Creates Community: Congregational life reflects high quality personal and group relationships.

Encourages Small Groups: The congregation engages members in study, conversation, and prayer about faith in daily life.

Promotes Worship: The congregation expands and renews spirit-filled, uplifting worship.

Fosters Ethical Responsibility: The congregation encourages individual and social moral responsibility.

Promotes Service: The congregation sponsors outreach, service projects, and cultural immersions both locally and globally.

Demonstrates Effective Practices: The congregation engages in a wide variety of ministry practices and activities.

Participate in the Congregation: Youth are engaged in a wide spectrum of congregational relationships and practices.

Assume Ministry Leadership: Youth are invited, equipped and affirmed for leadership in congregational activities.

(From *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry* p. 58-59 – see the book for more specific information and examples.)

Application Tool

Application Tool 6: Developing a Youth-Friendly and Youth-Involving Congregation

<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-6-Developing-a-Youth-Friendly-and-Youth-Involving-Congregation.pdf>

Youth Ministry

The Impact of Youth Ministry on the Lives of Young People

One of the perennial questions asked about youth ministry by pastors, church staff, and members of the congregation is pretty direct: *Is youth ministry making a difference in the lives of young people?...* Youth ministry does make a difference in the lives of young people – it promotes their growth in faith and the application of their faith in daily life, while also helping them respond to the personal, family, and social issues they face daily. But how does youth ministry do this?... Several “marks and means” of discipleship emerge in the study. These elements describe the core attributes of the congregations, their youth ministry, and their young people.

1. Disciples Know Jesus
2. Disciples Know the Bible
3. Disciples Know the Christian Faith
4. Disciples Make Faith a Way of Life
5. Disciples are Mentored
6. Disciples Are Equipped

(From *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry* pp.123-127 – see the book for more specific information and examples.)

Youth Ministry Qualities & Assets

Establishes a Caring Environment: Youth ministry provides multiple nurturing relationships and activities resulting in a welcoming atmosphere of respect, growth, and belonging.

Develops Quality Relationship: Youth ministry develops authentic relationships among youth and adults establishing an environment of presence and life engagement.

Focuses on Jesus Christ: Youth ministry's mission, practices, and relationships are inspired by the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Considers Life Issues: Youth ministry values and addresses the full range of young people's lives.

Uses Many Approaches: Youth ministry intentionally and creatively employs multiple activities appropriate to the ministry's mission and context.

Is Well Organized and Planned: Youth ministry engages participants and leaders in long range planning, implementation, evaluation, and innovation in an atmosphere of high expectations.
(From *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry* p. 59-60 – see the book for more specific information and examples.)

Application Tools

Application Tool 7

Evaluating Faith Assets: Youth Ministry Qualities

<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-7-Evaluating-Faith-Assets-YouthMinistry-Qualities.pdf>

Application Tool 8

Evaluating Your Programming Mix

<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-8-Evaluating-Your-Programming-Mix.pdf>

Family and Household Faith

The Continuing Influence of Parents and the Family on the Faith of Youth

One of the most significant, and to many startling, findings in the National Study on Youth and Religion (NSYR) is the impact of parental faith and religiosity on the beliefs and practices of teenagers... The Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry confirms the continuing influences describe the role of family and household faith, adding another influence to the youth-friendly culture of the whole congregation and the effective age-level ministry with youth... EYM congregations invite parents into partnership with the church in nurturing the faith and their sons and daughters. The partnerships between the congregation and the families of their youth create a working synergy that enables the congregations, its youth ministry, and the families to nurture and support the lives and faith of their young people.

(From *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry* pp.171-183 – see the book for more specific information and examples.)

Family and Household Faith Assets

Possesses Strong Parental Faith: Parents possess and practice a vital and informed faith.

Promotes Family Faith Practices: Parents engage youth and the whole family in conversations, prayer, bible reading, and service that nurture faith and life.

Reflects Family Harmony: Family members' expressions of respect and love create an atmosphere promoting faith.

Equips Parents: The congregation offers instruction and guidance that nurture parental faith and equips parents for nurturing faith at home.

Fosters Parent-Youth Relationships: The congregation offers parent-youth activities that strengthen parent-youth relationships.

(From *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry* p. 60– see the book for more specific information and examples.)

Application Tools

Application Tool 9

Evaluating Faith Assets: Family and Household Faith

<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-9-Evaluating-Faith-Assets-Family-and-Household-Faith.pdf>

Application Tool 10

Principles for Family-Friendly Congregations and Youth Ministries

<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-10-Principles-for-Family-Friendly-Congregations-and-Youth-Ministries.pdf>

Application Tool 11

Strategies for Family Faith Formation

<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-11-Strategies-for-Family-Faith-Formation.pdf>

Application Tool 12

Sample Survey: Parents of Teenagers

<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-12-Sample-Survey-Parents-of-Teenagers.pdf>

Congregational Leadership

Committed and competent leadership is at the heart of the exemplary congregations' faithful and effective ministries with youth. These ministries combine knowledgeable pastors, valued youth ministers, committed adult leaders in youth ministry, with gifted young people and dedicated parents in "cultures of shared leadership." Pastors in EYM congregations, whether directly involved in youth ministry or not, either lead or provide critical support to this culture and the youth ministry leadership team. The prime youth minister in the congregations (most often unpaid but publically "called"), the adult leaders, parents and youth themselves each make their unique contributions to the teams' effectiveness.

(From The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry p. 205 – see the book for more specific information and examples.)

The Rector/Pastor Assets

Spiritual Influence: *The pastor knows and models the transforming presence of God in life and ministry.*

Interpersonal Competence: *The pastor builds a sense of community and relates well with adults and youth.*

Supports Youth Ministry: *The pastor understands, guides, and advocates for youth ministry.*

Supports Leaders: *The pastor affirms and mentors youth and adults leading youth ministry.*

(From The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry p. 206-208 – see the book for more specific information and examples.)

Application Tool

Application Tool 13

Pastor Reflection Tool

<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-13-Pastor-Reflection-Tool.pdf>

Youth Minister Assets

Provides Competent Leadership: *The youth minister reflects superior theological, theoretical, and practical knowledge and skill in leadership.*

Models Faith: *The youth minister is a role model reflecting a living faith for youth and adults.*

Mentors Faith Life: *The youth minister assists adult leaders and youth in their faith life both one-on-one and in groups.*

Develops Teams: *The youth minister reflects a clear vision and attracts gifted youth and adults into leadership.*

Knows Youth: *The youth minister knows youth and the changes in youth culture, and utilizes these understandings in ministry.*

Establishes Effective Relationships: *The youth minister enjoys effective relationships with youth, parents, volunteers, and staff.*

One unique feature of the youth ministers in the study is that they all had served in the same congregation for many years, developing connections and networks of influence and leadership. It appears that several factors contribute to the effectiveness and longevity of youth ministers in the EYM Study.

1. A congregation with high expectations "calls" a person of strong faith and passion for ministry with youth.
2. Once that person has been called, the congregation supports them with prayer, resources, ongoing education and networks of support.
3. The person who has been called thrives in this culture of high expectations, ample resources, and ongoing learning and strong support. The youth minister deepens his or her commitment, expands personal investment, and fires the imagination. Full of spirit and hope, the youth minister stays for years, even decades.
4. The youth minister's faithfulness and effectiveness inspires the congregation to higher expectations, imagination and support. And forward it goes over long period of expanding impact in the lives of young people.

(From The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry p. 210 – see the book for more specific information and examples.)

Application Tool

Application Tool 14

Youth Minister Reflection Tool

<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-14-Youth-Minister-Reflection-Tool.pdf>

Youth and Adult Leadership in Youth Ministry Assets

Youth and adult leadership – people of a vibrant and informed Christian faith who are “called” to youth ministry leadership. They are in significant relationships with each other and with the young people of their congregation. They prepare for their ministry through training and apprenticeships in their leadership roles.

Equipped for Peer Ministry: *Youth practice friendship, care-giving, and outreach and are supported by ministry training and caring adults.*

Establish Adult-Youth Mentoring: *Adults engage youth in the Christian faith and life supported by informed leadership.*

Participate in Training: *Youth and adults are equipped for ministry in an atmosphere of high expectations.*

Possess Vibrant Faith: *Youth and adult leaders possess and practice a vital and informed Christian faith.*

Provides Competent Adult Leaders: *Adults foster authentic relationships and utilize effective practices in youth ministry with a clear vision strengthened by training and support.*

(From The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry p. 210-211 – see the book for more specific information and examples.)

Application Tools

Application Tool 15

Servant Leadership Reflection

<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-15-Servant-Leadership-Reflection.pdf>

Application Tool 16

Spiritual Leadership: Deepening Your Spiritual Life

<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-16-Spiritual-Leadership-Deepening-Your-Spiritual-Life.pdf>

Application Tool 17

A Checklist for Developing Leadership

<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-17-A-Checklist-for-Developing-Leadership.pdf>

Application Tool 18

Sample Adult and Youth Leader Interest Finder

<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-18-Sample-Adult-and-Youth-Leader-Interest-Finder.pdf>

Application Tool 19

Sample Evaluation of a Ministry Position

<http://www.firstthird.org/eym/EYM-Tool-19-Sample-Evaluation-of-a-Ministry-Position.pdf>