# Growing
# TEEN
# Disciples

Strategies for
**REALLY EFFECTIVE**
Youth Ministry

**Frank Mercadante**

Here is what these leaders have to say about **Growing Teen Disciples:**

In **Growing Teen Disciples,** Mercadante provides a comprehensive resource for developing parish youth ministry. He illustrates each chapter with his personal experience and real-life stories. He blends youth ministry theory and methodology with sound theology, and he identifies the very practical skills required to be a minister to, with, and for young people. This is certainly a valuable resource for both the new and experienced coordinator of youth ministry.

—**Robert McCarty,** executive director, National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, Inc.

With **Growing Teen Disciples,** Frank is concerned about youth becoming disciples for *life.* The chapters of this book move beyond the cute and clever—they are thoughtful and helpful, and they help to redefine youth ministry and the competencies needed and so lacking in many youth programs today. Thank God for this book!

—**David Haas,** director of the Emmaus Center for Music, Prayer, and Ministry, Eagan, Minnesota

**Growing Teen Disciples** is a "must have" resource for parish youth ministry. It is clearly the fruit of a labor of love and passion for God that is manifested in the lifework that Frank has shared with and witnessed to so many of us in the field of youth ministry. Well done, good and faithful servant.

—**Randy H. Kollars,** director of youth and young adult ministry, Archdiocese of Portland, Oregon

**Growing Teen Disciples** clearly addresses the issues needed to effectively work with young people. This book is a great resource in reaching and discipling young people for Jesus Christ. But more important than the printed words, Frank's heart for the Lord and for young people comes across.

—**Dr. Dan Spader,** executive director, Sonlife Ministries

Frank Mercadante, author of **Growing Teen Disciples,** understands that creating disciples of Jesus Christ should be at the heart of Catholic youth ministry. Mercadante's theory and theology are sound. His many tips and practical suggestions come from years of discipling teens. Mercadante has a deep love for the Lord and for teenagers, and this comes through in this extremely helpful book.

—**Fr. Dave Pivonka,** director of Steubenville Youth Conferences

**Growing Teen Disciples** is a wonderfully holistic synthesis of Frank Mercadante's genius in working with young people and the adults who mentor them. Frank combines a deep knowledge of adolescence, faith development, evangelical skills, and tradition in offering effective strategies for full-cycle youth evangelization and ministry. This is a foundational book for anyone concerned about youth, involved in youth work, or concerned about the future of Christianity.

—**Fr. Patrick Brennan,** founding president, National Council for Catholic Evangelization

What Frank does best is share what the bottom-line, no-nonsense truth is in youth ministry. Everything we do must be based on a relationship with Jesus Christ, and the way we share that relationship is in building meaningful relationships with teenagers. I recommend this book highly, knowing that lives will be changed.

—**Steve Angrisano,** musician and speaker

# Growing TEEN Disciples

## Strategies for
## REALLY EFFECTIVE
## Youth Ministry

**Frank Mercadante**

FRANK C. MERCADANTE is the director of Cultivation Ministries, a not-for-profit corporation founded in 1990 for the purpose of cultivating team-based, comprehensive, and disciple-making Catholic youth ministries by training, resourcing, and supporting adult and teen leaders. Mercadante has earned a bachelor's degree in Christian education from Wheaton College, a master's degree in pastoral studies from Loyola University, Chicago, and a certificate in advanced studies in youth ministry from the Center for Ministry Development. He was director of youth ministry at Saint John Neumann in Saint Charles, Illinois, for ten years. Mercadante's work in youth evangelization was featured in the book *Parishes That Excel*, by Patrick Brennan.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# PREFACE

During adolescence I ventured as close to church-sponsored events as one does to a person suffering from the effects of the stomach flu. I kept a *safe* distance. Even though I considered church programming as enjoyable as a good toothache, I was, however, thinking about spiritual things. I was interested in God, but not the church. I was asking some of the classic life questions, such as: What is life all about? What is the purpose of it all? Where am I going in my life? If the church had the answers, I wasn't convinced they could communicate them in a way I would understand.

During my senior year in high school some of my friends kept pestering me about attending this retreat. I couldn't imagine its being worth my time. Besides, I didn't want to take a chance on jeopardizing my reputation by getting involved in something that could be labeled as "uncool." Finally, I broke down, gave in, and went.

The retreat weekend was supported by adults, but primarily led by teens. Several people my own age gave what they called "witness" talks, speaking of a Jesus who was actively involved in their lives. It sounded as if they knew Jesus well enough to go out to lunch with him. I had no idea until that weekend that God could be that personal. For the first time that I could name, I felt Christ's love and presence in a deeply profound manner. What I experienced that weekend seemed to address and satisfy the hungers of my heart.

It's been twenty years since that retreat weekend and its effects have not worn off. For starters, I married the girl who gave the first witness talk that weekend. Second, my experience was not a fleeting emotional high. It was the beginning of a relationship with Jesus Christ, which has steadily grown. He continues to touch and transform my life in ways that amaze me. Third, my love for the church of my youth was reignited, and I began to appreciate and value my Catholic heritage again. Finally, I felt called to proclaim the love of God, embodied in the person of Jesus Christ, and wanted to equip others to do the same. Since it was during the rocky times of my own adolescence that God so powerfully impacted my life, I have made teens the focus of my own ministry.

This book is written with teens like I was in mind. It is written for teens who find the church and God boring, outdated, and irrelevant.

There are many spiritually hungry teens who may not find the church's menu very appetizing. In this book I describe a youth ministry approach that is teen-friendly, culturally-relevant, and that creatively expresses the gospel. Often youth ministry is introverted, primarily addressing teens who either want to or have to come to our programs, while forgetting those teens who need to come. This book is intended to help expand our vision in light of Christ's call to minister to "all" people.

Fruitful youth ministry, however, goes beyond such evangelization. Fruitful evangelization is about the whole process of disciple-making. As the USCC statement *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* states, the first goal of youth ministry is "To empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today." *Growing Teen Disciples* is written with the hope that it will shed further light on what it means to be a teenage disciple of Jesus Christ, and to provide practical strategies for adolescent disciple-making. The process I have outlined in this book—Preparing the Soil, Sowing the Seed, Growing Mature Disciples, and Reaping the Fruit—is proven and practical and will help take us to that goal.

I am forever grateful for the teenage disciples who risked inviting me to the retreat that opened my guarded heart to God's transforming love. My prayer is that God would use this work to encourage and equip youth workers in their continuing efforts to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

—Frank Mercadante
St. Charles, Illinois
January, 1998

# Section One

# Preparing the Soil

# 1

# Disciple-Making Youth Ministry

Immediately after his encounter with Jesus, the apostle Philip enthusiastically shared his messianic discovery with his friend Nathaniel. Nathaniel's response was nothing short of a verbal bucket of cold water. Familiar with the reputation of Jesus' hometown, he responded by asking whether or not anything good could come from Nazareth (see John 1:43-46).

Similarly, when someone speaks enthusiastically about *youth ministry*, we, like modern day Nathaniels, might be tempted to reply by asking, "could anything good come from adolescence?"

Just ask your typical adult if he or she would like to go through adolescence again. Among the sane there are few takers. Most are simply thankful they survived the first time! To be honest, youth have been trouble for literally thousands of years. Throughout history a sure-fire marker that one has successfully made the transition into adulthood is the tendency to see the youth of the day as much worse than previous generations, especially one's own! Of course, each generation's elders thought the same of them. But, like a gift fruitcake, this attitude gets successively passed down the line. That is why for many adults the words "teenage discipleship" are categorized with terms like "jumbo shrimp," as oxymorons.

After over fifteen years of youth ministry experience, I would readily concede that adolescence is one of the most difficult periods of life, and that youth ministry is one of the most challenging areas of service in the church today. Yet, I have witnessed many young people over the years who have been exemplary models of Christian discipleship. Historically, our Catholic heritage boasts of childhood saints and adolescent martyrs. Today's youth are no different. They still possess that contagious enthusiasm and refreshing idealism. They are capable of serving Christ in a heroic manner when these natural, developmental characteristics are applied to living out the gospel.

## Defining Youth

We must first ask the question, what do we mean by youth? The time span of adolescence has stretched as our techno-society requires more preparation to function fully as an adult. In recent years, adolescence has been stratified into three distinct categories: early adolescence: 12- to 15-year-olds; middle adolescence: 15- to 18-year-olds; late adolescence: 18- to 21-year-olds. Discipleship takes on a different appearance in each of these time frames.[1] This book, unless otherwise noted, will generally focus on the ages of 14- to 18-years-old, or roughly, the senior high years. The general principles, however, are applicable to each of the three categories.

### The Need for a New Term

Do you remember when a "mouse" was simply a small, gray rodent that caused you to leap onto kitchen counters? Do you remember when "gay" was a word for happy? Or, "pot" was something you cooked a roast in? Well, sometimes, the meaning of words change. For example, an "enabler" once meant someone who helped others to channel their gifts in a positive way. Redefined by AA and the 12-step movement, the word has come to mean assisting someone in irresponsible behavior. The last thing you want to be today is an "enabler."

Similarly, our culture seems to have redefined the words "Catholic" and "Christian." These wonderful words have lost their powerful, positive impact. To some, a Catholic is someone who is born to Catholic parents. Or, maybe it means a married person with lots of kids. A "Christian" may be thought of as a preachy person who always totes a bible.

We cannot steer the culture toward more accurate definitions. But for the sake of our young people, we do need to find and use words that capture the essence of what it means to follow Jesus. We need to provide for youth a handle on who they can be as Catholics and Christians. They need a worthy, uplifting, and scripturally-sound term that describes the exciting and challenging adventure of serving Christ, without any ambiguous or negative connotations. That very designation could be *disciple*.

It has been only in recent times that the word disciple has made a comeback in Catholic vocabulary. The Second Vatican Council officially reintroduced the term of discipleship into Roman Catholic consciousness.[2]

## What Is a Disciple?

Disciples are certainly not unique to Christianity. Discipleship was a common form of training employed in Hellenistic, Roman, and Jewish cultures. The word disciple comes from

the Greek term *mathletes*, which means "learner, apprentice, or pupil." A disciple was a person who studied under a great teacher.[3] Each of these great masters would apply their own unique conditions for discipleship. Jesus was no exception.

A *disciple of Christ* is a committed follower of the person, teachings, values, and lifestyle of Jesus. This kind of "learner" goes beyond theory and book knowledge. A disciple of Christ can be thought of as a practitioner in the kingdom of God. Jesus' "mathletes" learn through action in the context of everyday living. The goal of this apprenticeship of life is to become like the teacher himself (see Luke 6:40). The disciple is not, however, a special or elite type of Christian. The Second Vatican Council documents use the term as a virtual synonym for any Christian.[4] Discipleship is indeed normal Christianity.

## Qualities of Discipleship

### 1. Discipleship is a process

As the New Testament describes what it means to be a disciple of Christ, we cannot help but be disturbed by some confusing and contradictory facts. On one hand, the disciple is described as one who puts Jesus before all relationships (Luke 14:26), possessions and property (Luke 14:33), personal ambition (Mark 10:42-45), and even life itself (Luke 9:24). On the other hand, we see disciples behaving in ways that are not all that worthy of emulation. They are contentious (Mark 9:34), violent (Luke 9:52-55), spiritually dull (Matthew 16:5-12), and even mean to children (Luke 18:15)!

So who is the real disciple? Is it the saintly spiritual superhero? Or is it the bungling religious oaf? The answer is: both are. By definition, the disciple is a learner—not an ecclesial-board-certified expert. A disciple is someone who has yet to arrive. Discipleship is not a destination, but a process of stretching, falling, growing, questioning, and advancing in the lifelong pursuit of becoming like Jesus. Like the kingdom of God, the disciple's journey resides within the constant tension between the "here and now" and the "not yet." I am a disciple, but not yet fully a disciple. The apostle Paul states this clearly when he writes in Philippians 3:12-15:

> It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus. Brothers, I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession. Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward

**Discipleship is indeed normal Christianity.**

calling, in Christ Jesus. Let us, then, who are "perfectly mature" adopt this attitude.

Appreciating discipleship as a process or journey is critical to understanding the adolescent disciple. To avoid unrealistic expectations, discipleship needs to be placed in the context of human development.

## 2. Discipleship is lived in the context of community

The word "disciple," in its singular form, is used very little in the New Testament.[5] When it is used, it is primarily in the context of Jesus describing the conditions of being a disciple. The vast majority of citations is the plural form: "disciples." This suggests that discipleship is normally carried on in the context of community.

Beyond this, the New Testament makes it clear that the disciples of Jesus spent a considerable amount of time together. Jesus' disciples were called to live in relationship with one another. Jesus went as far as to say that a distinguishing characteristic that would help identify his disciples in the world would be their love for one another (see John 13:35). Their interaction with one another was a critical aspect of their discipleship formation.

Naturally, youth discipleship is carried out in the environment of the teen's participation in the peer and larger faith community. Youth need to experience a sense of belonging, feel like valuable members of their groups and be challenged by their peers. There is no Christian discipleship apart from the faith community.

## 3. Discipleship is lived while in relationship with Christ

During my son Michael's preschool years, I spent countless hours pitching plastic baseballs to him. It was a tedious process, but after some time I saw considerable improvement in his ability to hit the ball. Steadily, his coordination increased, his concentration became better focused, and his strength grew. He was becoming a consistent hitter.

One day, during a picnic with numerous preschoolers, a parent-child Whiffle ball game began. We gave each of the kids a chance to hit the ball five times. For the first time, I watched Michael play ball with kids his own age. I was amazed at how he hit the ball more consistently than the others. His coordination and ability to connect with the ball was outstanding.

Instantly, as only a father can, I came to the conclusion that my son was athletically gifted and headed for the major leagues. I thought to myself, "This kid is a baseball prodigy! He must have inherited it from his dad."

Needless to say, it didn't take long for me to re-enter the atmosphere of reality. With time, further experience, and observation, I came to some very different conclusions concerning my son's athletic ability. When Michael played better than his peers as a preschooler, it was not because he was uniquely gifted or divinely destined to enter the baseball Hall of Fame. The difference that made Michael stand out was really very simple: *Michael spent focused time with his daddy.*

It works that way in discipleship. Effective living, loving, and ministering are by-products of spending time with the Lord Jesus Christ. A disciple of Jesus Christ is not a person who simply ascribes to Jesus' philosophy of life. Jesus calls the disciple to be in intimate union with him (see John 15:1-8). Discipleship is lived in relationship with Jesus. Our true effectiveness as a disciple is directly related to the quality of the relationship we have with Jesus. The result of abiding in him is fruitfulness for our own lives.

### 4. Discipleship is lived in every aspect of life

Discipleship is a part of what we do each day. It is not like being a member of a club where we only take on a designated role during meeting times. Being a disciple is who we are; it is central to our identity. It encompasses everything we do. It affects our view of life, our values, and our actions. It cannot be separated from the whole of our existence. The disciple of Jesus Christ is called to be a disciple every minute of the day and in every area of life. Discipleship involves interacting with all of human life as a follower of Jesus Christ, including the physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Additionally, a disciple impacts his world by extending the values and priorities of Jesus into every larger area of life, such as the political, economical, and cultural.

### 5. Discipleship is fruit-bearing

Jesus clearly intended for his disciples to be fruitful (see John 15:5-8). A functioning disciple is a fruitful disciple. There are several types of spiritual fruit of which the scriptures speak. The first is the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23). As the disciple matures, and he or she surrenders more deeply to the work of the Holy Spirit, his or her life is characterized by love, joy, peace, patient endurance, kindness, generosity, faith, mildness, and chastity. These internal attributes become a gift to all those around the disciple. The second type of fruit is the fruit of the harvest (see Matthew 9:36-38). The fruit of the harvest involves the proclamation of the kingdom of God through evangelization, teaching, healing, delivering, and serving. A third type of fruit is produced as a result of living and obeying

Effective living, loving, and ministering are by-products of spending time with the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's commandments through a lifestyle of justice, love, and service to others (see Isaiah 5:7; Luke 6:43ff.).

## Stages of Discipleship

In the final chapter and verses of Matthew's gospel, Jesus mandated making "disciples of all nations." What did this mean? Some have understood it as the call to evangelization. Others have seen it as the initial follow-up process of catechesis after a person had been baptized. Another understanding is that Jesus' mandate is the call to full-time Christian service.

Actually Jesus meant the *whole process* of leading a person to conversion, establishing the person in their faith through catechesis, and training her or him to make an impact on the world. Discipleship includes this complete cycle of Christian development.

Making disciples can be likened to the cultivation process in farming. It begins with the preparing of the soil. We till the ground, remove the rocks, fertilize the plot, and irrigate the land. After the soil is worked, we can gently scatter the seed, water it each night, chase the menacing crows, and hope for germination. In time, a tiny bud bursts forth, and we find ourselves with the task of nurturing it towards maturity and fruitfulness. Our focus and tasks change so that we occupy ourselves with weeding, further fertilization, watering, staking, and protecting the young shoot. As the plant gradually matures, it begins to yield the anticipated fruit. Fruit is not only a gift to others, but within it are the seeds that bring the entire process to life again.

Using cultivation imagery, we can identify three distinct stages in the discipleship process for teens. The first is the **sowing of the seed.** This stage is characterized by pre-evangelistic and evangelistic activities. The process includes preparing teens to consider the gospel by demonstrating Christ's love, and the actual proclamation of the good news. The goal is germination, or conversion of hearts. The potential target groups are the inactive unconverted, the active unevangelized, active teens in need of renewal, and the secular unchurched.

The second stage is the **nurturing for growth**. This stage is devoted to securely rooting, firmly establishing, and building up the believer in faith (see Colossians 2:7). The goal of this stage is Christian maturity. It targets those who have been initially evangelized and need to bring that experience to greater depth and maturity.

The third stage is the **fruitfulness phase** in which the fruit of the labors are reaped and shared. This stage involves training, equipping, and sending forth the disciple to build up the

church and serve the world. This period is characterized by the process of becoming like Jesus in an "other-focused" lifestyle. This phase targets those who have been evangelized, are growing in faith, and are now ready to become workers in the kingdom. This is the "give it away" phase.

All three stages form a continuous cyclical loop, building from the previous stage and ideally leading to the next. It is important to note, however, that each stage is never fully achieved, but once begun, is ongoing in the life of the disciple. For instance, a teen might regularly share his or her faith on a peer ministry team (stage three activity), but still be in need of deeper personal renewal (stage one), and greater spiritual maturity (stage two). On the other hand, a teen who has yet to be evangelized (stage one) might participate in a service-oriented work camp (stage three) and experience an initial faith-awakening experience. In theory, the stages might appear to have a linear motion, but in reality could be best described as having a spiral movement.

In addition to the three stages for cultivating teen disciples there is a stage that mainly involves the adult leaders who will be working with the teens. This "pre-stage" can be known as "soil preparation." It allows for many techniques for selecting and training adults to work with teens. This soil preparation stage is a primary focus of the text that follows in Section 1 of this book.

## Principles for the Harvest

A fruitful crop does not just happen. Producing fruit is an *intentional* effort. Without the careful planning and persistent effort on the part of the farmer there is no harvest. In a similar manner, disciples of Christ will not just spring up spontaneously in our youth ministries. If they do appear, it will be because they were purposed by the leadership. Youth ministries produce disciples because they begin with that end in mind. All programs, events, structures, and activities can be traced back to this central mission.

Secondly, germination and growth are beyond the natural abilities of the farmer. *Growth is a work of God* (see 1 Corinthians 3:6-7). The sower cannot cause a seed to germinate, grow, or bear fruit. The role of the farmer is to cooperate and partner with God by providing the right conditions to produce growth. Creating fertile conditions requires great effort and hard work on the part of the leadership. Youth ministry leaders do not play the role of God attempting to force growth.

Thirdly, *fruitfulness comes in due season*. Crops may have differing time tables, but none are instantaneous. The discipling process takes time. We must be patient. Expecting a

**I**f [teen disciples] do appear, it will be because they were purposed by the leadership.

bumper crop within the first year is unrealistic. Forced growth is most certainly a recipe for failure.

## Programming Based on the Discipling Process

Each distinct stage of growth requires a particular focus, specific tools, and offers a set of unique challenges. If a youth ministry is to be effective in making disciples, the leadership must intentionally address the whole process. Young people need to be evangelized, established in the faith, and equipped for service. All the stages need to be *philosophically* reflected in a youth ministry mission, and *practically* addressed in its structures, programs, and events. Programs need to be linked and built upon each other in a purposeful manner, meeting a variety of spiritual dispositions, yet moving teens progressively towards developing greater Christian maturity. If our desire is to produce mature disciples, our structures need to lead us successively to this end.

Too often, however, youth ministry programs have no clear destination or focus. When helping plan any event, I always ask what the purpose of the activity is. Before I can plan I need to know what we are hoping to achieve. More than once event organizers have responded to my question with, "I really don't know." Without clear initial objectives it becomes impossible to evaluate outcomes.

Often, success is measured solely by how many teens attend an event, or by how much fun they have. Instead, we need to ask: In what way is this event, approach, or program contributing to the development of committed disciples of Jesus Christ? In what way do our various programs work together to facilitate progressive growth in discipleship?

It is not enough to address or emphasize only one aspect of discipleship. For instance, a perennial vulnerability for Catholics has been the absence of effective youth evangelization. We have been busy providing kids with information *about* God. Somehow, we presumed young people had already experienced a personal encounter with Christ. We scratched our heads in bewilderment by their lack of interest in our catechetically-based programs. Our problem lay in the fact that we did not prepare them spiritually for catechesis.

Effective discipling of teens is based on our ability to build a youth ministry that follows this natural step-by-step sequence of development. Normal growth and development follows a sequential progression. Infants begin life with liquids, moves to pureed solids, and finally, after they grow some teeth and further develop their digestive systems, they consume solids.

## Summary

"Christian" was a term coined in Antioch during the first century and was used to refer to those who followed the teaching and way of Jesus of Nazareth. To be called and known as a Christian in this era carried with it serious ramifications. One's life was literally at risk because of such an association.

Today, it is not unusual and even very culturally acceptable to be considered a Christian; and while its significance has certainly not lessened, true devotion to this title has. It is often misunderstood, taken for granted, and misused. The term "Catholic" can complicate things further. Teens who describe themselves as Catholic today may do so only because their parents are or were Catholics. Perhaps the use of the word "disciple" will more accurately define the Catholic Christian who is committed to following the person, teachings, values, and lifestyle of Jesus Christ.

True discipleship is a lifelong process that typically begins with baptism. The disciple or learner has yet to "arrive" but must continually work out his salvation with fear and trembling (see Philippians 2:12). Discipleship is lived in relationship with Christ within a community context. The disciple does more than subscribe to a philosophy, but, rather, strives to commit all that he or she has and does to the Lord; no aspect of life can be left unaffected (or infected). Proof of one's discipleship is living a fruitful existence.

Teen discipleship occurs in three cyclical stages: the sowing stage, the nurturing for growth stage, and the fruitfulness stage. In simple terminology, we want to "bring em' in, get em' ready, and send em' out!" When seeking to call God's children to discipleship, we must be intentional in our efforts, we must recognize that any growth that takes place is the work of God, and we must understand that fruitfulness comes in due season. Patience—but also persistence—is a definite requirement. All youth ministry programming must keep in mind and correspond to the discipling process. Programs must genuinely lead teens to Jesus and not only be designed as fun, large-scale events.

A pre-stage to the discipleship process involves training adult leaders and can be thought of as "soil preparation." The chapters in Section One deal primarily with the "preparation of the sowers," that is, the recruitment and training of adults who will lead and work with youth.

## Application

The resource on page 23, "Youth Program Assessment," is designed to aid in the assessment of current youth programs, activities, or events according to the three stages of "growing teen disciples" described in this chapter. This resource may be used as a tool for initial assessment by all who work with youth.

# Youth Program Assessment

In the first column, list your parish's regular youth programs, activities, and events. In the second column, write what you see as the primary purpose of each. In the third column, enter which discipling stage (sowing, nuturing, or fruitfulness) best defines the program. In the fourth column, describe the role this program plays in the overall discipling process. That is, how does it relate to the other programs, activities, and events?

| Program/Activity/Event | Primary Purpose | Discipling Stage | Role in Overall Discipling Process |
|---|---|---|---|
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| | | | |
| | | | |

# 2

# DISCIPLES
# MAKE
# DISCIPLES

One Friday night a group of teenage peer ministers made a spontaneous visit to our home. My then six-year-old son Michael joined them in our lower-level family room. While still upstairs, I could hear their loud chatter and cackling. Feeling a bit envious of their fun, I made my way downstairs. I found, to my immediate dismay, my innocent first-grade son sitting on a couch with a puzzled and troubled look on his face. He was surrounded by a group of astonished teenagers who were pointing and laughing at him. My facial expression must have given me away, as they nervously tried to explain the situation. Ray, the only teen with enough composure to communicate, said, "Frank, we aren't laughing at him. Really. We just can't get over how he looks, talks, and acts like you! He even has all your weird mannerisms. He's a little Frank!"

I glanced over to Michael, and it became quite obvious to me why they were laughing. There he sat, sporting a posture and expression typical of me. I guess they were right. He was a "little Frank."

Over the years my wife and I have heard similar comments about all our children. They all have that "Mercadante look." No great mystery: they share the same parents.

## Developing Adult Leadership

The offspring of pigs are pigs. Cattle beget cattle. And disciples make disciples. To spiritually reproduce disciples of Jesus Christ, we, ourselves, must first become disciples.

Youth ministries that make a real difference in the lives of teens invest a significant amount of time and energy into developing their adult leadership. Our leaders must live and model the lives we want our teens to grow towards.

The apostle Paul understood this principle well when he challenged the Corinthian church to be imitators of himself (see 1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1). The Corinthian "youth group"

was a youth minister's worst nightmare. They fought with each other, winked at immorality, tended toward spiritual conceit, and sued one another, to name just a few of their infractions. Because they were spiritually immature, Paul had to provide for them a tangible and practical expression of what it meant to follow Christ. Likewise, today's teens need concrete models to demonstrate vividly what it means to follow Jesus. Leaders must be genuine models whose lives serve as fully illustrated instruction manuals on how to live genuinely as a disciple.

When Paul guided the Philippian church he said, "Be imitators of me. Observe those who conduct themselves according to the *model* (italics mine) you have in us" (see Philippians 3:17). Additionally, Paul challenges the young leader Timothy to be a continuing *example* in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity to those he is called to lead (see 1 Timothy 4:12). The Greek word *tupos* is used for "model" and "example" in both citations. In other words Paul, is saying that we need to be a representation or standard which other believers can emulate.

The fact is our lives are advertisements for Jesus Christ and the church. The more significant question is: Are we the kind of advertisements that continuously compel teens single-heartedly to follow Christ? Or, do our unexamined lives provide a ready-made and convenient excuse to dismiss the gospel as a hypocritical sham?

Mahatma Gandhi considered becoming a Christian when he was a young man. He was not, however, all that impressed with too many Christians. In his autobiography Gandhi tells of a time when he fell asleep during a church service. Initially he felt bad, but was comforted by the fact that many of the believers in Christ were also sleeping—and they did not seem to feel bad at all! (Why should they? They probably left refreshed!) Gandhi was left with the impression that Christians didn't take their faith seriously. He was later quoted as saying, "I would become a Christian if it were not for the Christians."

This, unfortunately, represents a common impression teens receive of many adult Christians. The root meaning of *example* carries the very idea of leaving an impression. As adults pass through teens' lives, we leave our impressions or marks on them in one way or another. In the positive sense they could be indelible reminders of what it means truly to follow Jesus. In the negative sense, a mark can be a lasting scar that provides a stockpile of ammunition for one to reject the faith.

Becoming a visible example to others by embodying the gospel message is a very Catholic concept. Jesus is the first

*Are we the kind of advertisements that continuously compel teens single-heartedly to follow Christ?*

model of this approach. The incarnation brought God to flesh. Jesus' words, deeds, and life embody all that it means to love and serve God. He provides the ultimate example. In addition, we have many other heroes of our faith whose lives echo Paul's words: "Imitate me as I imitate Christ." As Catholics, we have the lasting gift of those exemplary brothers and sisters who walked before us in the faith. The lives of the saints serve as a living art museum, vividly displaying in many different colors and styles how the spiritual masters served Christ. At the very heart of our Catholic tradition, we deeply value and understand the need for flesh-and-blood heroes and heroines to guide and inspire us in our faith journey.

Beyond the canonized saint, our church has always taught the importance of every believer living in a manner worthy of the gospel. When the saints seem beyond our capabilities, or unrelatable to the present day, teens still have Mr. Lawlor the salesman, Georgia the mom, and Antonio the grandfather to provide relevant and tangible examples of following Christ. The first key to fruitful youth ministry is the development of leaders whose lives give our message credibility.

## People-Centered Youth Ministry

Disciples are not made through clever programs, activities, or events. Structures and meetings can be helpful, but they have no life in and of themselves. The life they give comes from the people involved. *Fruitful youth ministry is not program-centered, but people-centered.*

The impact of a people-centered ministry became crystal-clear to me through an experience of one of my stellar teens. As often happens, one particular senior class had a handful of "standout kids." Jessica was one of them. She had an attractive, even contagious spirituality that profoundly touched those around her. She was known for her warmth, kindness, and love towards all. She was one of those people who could make anyone feel special.

I hoped to spiritually clone Jessica. I said, "Jessica, you've barely missed a meeting in four years. Your commitment to Jesus and those around you has served as a model for all of us. What's your motivation? What sold you?"

Jessica's response was immediate and without a hint of hesitation. "That's easy," she said. "It was my first meeting."

"What was so special about that first meeting?" I inquired, secretly hoping I gave a dynamic, life-changing talk that night.

No such luck. She was unable to even recall the topic of the meeting, let alone the speaker. Something of greater significance left an indelible mark on her life. She related the following experience to me:

Jessica was already nervous when her grandparents dropped her off and drove away that first night. When she walked in the door she was startled by the large number of kids—not one of whom she recognized. And on top of that, she soon realized that these were all high schoolers and someone had made a huge mistake—she was a mere eighth grader!

Think back, if you will, to your junior high days. What would you do? Well, young Jessica retreated to the bathroom and began to cry. Becky, a senior peer minister with just the right compassion and leadership abilities, was in the restroom at the time. She asked, "Hey, are you okay?" And Jessica let go another flood of tears. The two girls talked a while, and Becky empathetically shared how she attended a different high school than almost all the other kids at these meetings and she, too, had once felt like a nervous, uncomfortable outsider.

To make a long story short, Becky took Jessica by the hand, sat next to her all night, introduced her to all her senior friends (including boys!), and genuinely cared for her. She even walked Jessica to her grandfather's car door when the meeting ended.

Jessica concluded the story by adding, "I kept coming because Becky and the others were nice. Through them I really saw what it was like to follow Christ."

Clearly, in direct response to Becky's gentle witness, Jessica would reproduce in dozens (maybe hundreds) of other kids the experience of feeling welcomed and loved at youth meetings over her years in high school.

Disciples make disciples. We reproduce in others what we ourselves are. Jessica had no recollection of the program, but only of a person who concretely demonstrated Christ's love. Too often, however, we fail to recognize the importance of developing people and spend more time on a relentless treadmill, frantically searching for a magical program or a fresh-off-the-press ministry fad that will finally be the spiritual panacea for which we've been waiting. I have yet to see a program that can take teens beyond the spiritual maturity of those administering it. The depth of our impact will be proportionate to the spiritual maturity of our leaders. There are no magical programs. We need to stop building programs and begin to build people. It is flesh-and-blood people who touch people.

The depth of our impact will be proportionate to the spiritual maturity of our leaders.

The culture in which we live is characterized by the superficial over-emphasis on appearance. Its influence can creep unnoticeably into the church. As a result we can major on the minors and minor on the majors. For example, while serving as a parish youth minister, our large-group evangelization outreach attracted as many as three hundred teens on a typical evening. Because of the large numbers, several local youth ministers would visit our gatherings in an effort to find the "secret" of the program. When asked what I felt was the reason for success, I consistently pointed to the prayerfulness and spirituality of both my adult and teen leaders. Almost without exception, I would get a polite acknowledgment of what I said, but no further interest or questioning in that area. By the look on some of their faces, I got the impression they felt I was holding back on them, jealously guarding the *real* secret of success. In an effort to get to the heart of the matter, the conversation would be redirected with questions like, "Where do you get those games from? Who are some good speakers? Do you know of any great skits?"

I would never be so extreme as to say that program resources are unimportant and matter little, yet I would say they are virtually insignificant in comparison to the internal development of our leadership. I know this because a year or so later, some of these youth ministers would be promoting similar programs, events, and activities, sometimes down to the same name! Regretfully, I must report, they failed to achieve the level of success for which they hoped. But in all honesty, I was never surprised.

We can never program or package spiritual impact. It's like the person who copies his neighbor's wiring and lighting blueprints in the hope of duplicating the warmth and hospitality of her home. He may have all the hardware in place, but no "people power" to light it. Likewise, programming can only serve as a conduit for God's Spirit to work. We often mistake the form for the substance. The electricity is in the power of God's Spirit working through us. Maybe that's what Paul meant when he said "my message and my proclamation were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of Spirit and power so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

To impact young people spiritually we need to be plugged in to the outlet. That power source is not the latest trend in programming or youth ministry activities. It is God's Spirit. God's Spirit works through those who are filled by him.

*We are our ministry*. Who we are spiritually will be the most significant factor in our effectiveness as youth workers.

## Youth Leader Profile

What does the disciple-making leader look like? Stereotypically, we might envision Ted Tosterone, a young man in his twenties with movie star looks and a Schwarzenegger physique, who plays guitar and sings better than most rock stars and can communicate in a manner that emotionally bounces teens from doubled over laughter to streaming tears in a single opening story. Or maybe Lauren Looks, Ted's female counterpart. She coaches the local high school's state champion cheerleading squad, has super model looks and clothes, inspires all the girls with spiritual lessons from her beauty pageant tales, and embodies the success every teen longs after.

Ted and Lauren may feature in Fox Network's latest teen drama series, but they are not likely to star in any parish youth ministry program. In reality, the disciple-making leader comes in many shapes and sizes. There is no single look, personality, or profile of the effective youth worker.

Unlike the stereotypical Ted and Lauren, most youth workers don't feel all that spectacular—and maybe that's good. Instead of placing their confidence in their own natural abilities, they are forced to rely on the power of God. Ralph was one such leader. He was a simple, quiet, and unassuming plumber, who with his wife, Donna, led one of our discipleship groups. During one of our youth gatherings, I asked teens to name a person who was an example of faith for them. Ralph's name topped the list (surpassing my own!). There was nothing about Ralph's personality that would draw attention to him, but there was an inner quality of character that young people saw as an example of what it meant to be a follower of Jesus.

Ralph taught me the importance of focusing on the internals, rather than the externals. It's not an outside flash, but an inside fire that ignites the flame of faith in others. When the prophet Samuel journeyed to the house of Jesse to anoint the next king of Israel, he was overcome by the appearance of Eliab and thought surely this is the Lord's anointed one. But the Lord said to Samuel: "Do not judge from his appearance or from his lofty stature, because I have rejected him. Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Spiritual leadership and ministry impact is an inside work.

## What Are the Internal Qualities
## of a Youth Leader?

The development of internal qualities is far more important for a youth leader than majoring in external characteristics. Let me suggest three internal qualities that distinguish the disciple-making youth worker.

### 1. Contagious Faith

I don't know all the physiological aspects of the influenza virus. I don't know exactly how it is spread from one person to another and another. I do, however, have an excellent understanding of the word "contagious." That understanding comes from experience. On more than one occasion, one of my six children has unsuspectingly smuggled some microscopic mischief into our home. And, by the way, I apologize in advance for this story.

The details are foggy, but I will never forget the overall impact of the autumn night when the stomach flu hit the Mercadante home. The kids were young—not old enough to realize the vital importance of getting to the commode in time.

I don't remember who was first, but in a two-hour span, six out of eight of us were struck by the almost lethal virus. My wife De and I scurried from bedroom to laundry room to bedroom, but we were always just one step too late. Of course, we, too, were making our own stops at the bathroom between cleanups. (I'm getting queasy just thinking about it!)

Well, in the end, we survived. So, you may ask, besides demonstrating the fact that you are a true youth minister by sharing a gross story, what's the point?

The point is this: Faith—like the flu—is contagious. We can't pass the stomach flu on to others without being infected with it ourselves. Leaders who have a one-hour-a-week faith cannot expect their teens to exhibit anything greater than that. It simply isn't enough to be deemed "dangerous" to others.

The Indian missionary Gordon Maxwell might be described as one "dangerous" person of faith—the kind an unbeliever might prefer quarantined. Those around him were well aware of his deep commitment to Christ. On one occasion, he asked a Hindu man to teach him the local language. The Hindu man replied, "No, sahib, for you will convert me to Christianity."

Maxwell tried to clarify: "You don't understand; all I want you to do is teach me the language." But the Hindu man replied, "I will not, for no one can live with you and not become a Christian." [6]

Now that is a "dangerous" form of faith!

We become contagious with the love of Christ when we are consistently exposed to Jesus' loving presence through a rich prayer and sacramental life. A contagious faith is a natural by-product of a living, active, intimate, and personal relationship with God. As we lovingly interact with God, he lovingly interacts through us. Ministry is not about doing good things for God. It is about God doing good things through us as we simply walk with him.

A contagious faith is not a personality trait. Often, we can erroneously associate it with someone with an outgoing and extroverted personality who also happens to have faith. Reserved individuals as well as bubbly people can exhibit a contagious faith. Contagious faith is measured not by volume of verbal expression, but by the quality of experiential knowledge of Christ, both illustrated in one's words and actions.

Contagious faith does not come overnight. It differs from human enthusiasm and zeal. It is not excitement. Instead, contagious faith is cultivated through consistent practice of spiritual disciplines. Our ability to respond to others as Jesus would respond does not depend on the intensity of our desire, but on how well we have spiritually prepared for the event. We cannot make large withdrawals of love and invest in others if we have not made any deposits. Those deposits are made as we regularly take time for solitude, prayer, scripture study, reconciliation, meditation, and eucharist.

I may get excited about an advertisement of an upcoming triathlon. I would be foolish, however, if I entered the competition in my present physical condition—unless, of course, I didn't mind drowning in the first event!

Embracing the message and values of the kingdom of God and effectively passing them on to others requires a daily spiritual conditioning. Contagious faith is a fruit of ongoing spiritual training.

Each day we must ask ourselves whether or not we are so infected with Jesus that those around us are at serious risk of catching our faith.

Is our faith contagious enough to cause a spiritual epidemic?

## 2. Christian Integrity

A few years back, I took a group of teens to a summer conference. I also had the joy of bringing along my pastor, who is a wonderful and godly man. We were sitting on a hard concrete floor in a large auditorium in the blistering heat of the early afternoon. I huddled the teens and my pastor around me just prior to the afternoon speaker.

Ministry is not about doing good things for God. It is about God doing good things through us as we simply walk with him.

I said, "Guys, I know what it is like after lunch. I feel it, too. We are tired and would like nothing more than to take a nap. It's a challenge to listen to another speaker; however, please try to sit up in a respectful position, make eye contact with the presenter, and listen to the best of your ability. Now, if your mind can't hold on to the content, I understand, but at least maintain a respectful posture. No speaker likes to look out at a comatose-like audience, blissfully snoring through his heart-felt message!"

Our speaker came on and sure enough his style was reminiscent of the most skilled anesthesiologist. A spirit of narcolepsy invaded the room as he droned on in a monotonous way.

My own teens were getting a little restless, but they were all holding to an attentive posture. The pastor, however, slipped into a more comfortable position with his back flat to the floor and his knees raised. At least his eyes were open, I assured myself, as I observed his glazed, blank stare at the ceiling. All of my teens looked at me and smirked.

A few minutes later, my pastor's knees collapsed to the floor while my entire group carefully observed him, and then me. He was now lying flat on the floor, with his eyes half open. It was then that an interesting dynamic took place. It was obvious that my teens wanted to be as comfortable and carefree as their pastor, but were wrestling with the weight of my earlier words. They were torn because I said to pay attention, but he was not, and he was the pastor!

Five more minutes passed by, and our "sleeping beauty" was now flat on his back, eyes tightly closed, and breathing very heavy. By the end of the talk, guess what position my teens were in? If you guessed the attentive one described by my earlier words to them, you are wrong. They followed what was modeled.

Although a humorous and light-hearted illustration, the fact is that what we do by way of our conduct will always weigh heavier than our words. Living with integrity means we are who we are no matter whom we are with, or what we are doing. It means being true to the good news we represent, even when others are not looking.

Once there was an unemployed young man who was applying for a new position. As he was filling out the application he came across a question asking whether he had ever been arrested for a crime. Without much thought he wrote "no." Below that question was a second, related to the first. It read: "Please explain why."

Not realizing it was a follow-up question for those who answered "yes" to the first question, the young man naively

wrote: "Well, I guess I never got caught." Needless to mention, he was not hired.

Integrity means never having to worry about getting caught. We have no need to cover up anything because there is nothing to hide. What you see is what you get.

In the wake of recent scandals rocking governments, corporations, and the church, we have a greater awareness than ever of the importance of a leader operating with integrity. Hypocrisy is a huge stumbling block that cheapens the message of the most costly sacrifice of love this world has ever known. The message of the gospel must be accompanied by a life lived with the utmost dignity. Jesus warns us about our lives detouring a young person from the kingdom when he says, "Woe to the world because of things that cause sin! Such things must come, but woe to the one through whom they come" (Matthew 18:7).

Integrity lends credibility to our message. It adds value to what we say. When my financial advisor suggests a particular investment, I first ask whether he has put his own money in the same fund. If he hasn't, I ignore his advice. If he places his money where his mouth is, then I will gladly follow his lead. Only when he lives his own financial advice am I willing to risk my own hard-earned cash.

Young people operate in a similar manner. When they see us speaking, living, and making decisions consistent with the principles of the good news we proclaim, only then will they consider investing their own lives. Integrity builds trust, and trust leads to confidence in our message. It is that very confidence that influences a young person towards commitment. The disciple-making leader impacts teens by living a life of Christian integrity.

### 3. A Servant's Heart

Servanthood has never enjoyed mass popularity in practice. (It remains to be seen if the latest national effort in volunteerism is a breakthrough in servanthood.) Rather, in an age highly influenced by both consumerism and hedonism, we are even less attracted to servanthood's demands. Instead, we are encouraged to grab for it all. We are reminded daily to look out for ol' number one. Jesus' teaching and example could not be more opposite of this contemporary approach to life. But what, we might ask, was the final reward of this selfless man? In light of his "final prize"—death on a cross—was his lifestyle of servanthood worth emulating?

To answer that question we have to reflect on the fifth chapter of the book of Revelation. The scene is of heaven during the end of the age. Jesus is declared by heavenly multitudes to be

> Integrity means never having to worry about getting caught.

the only One who is worthy to open the scroll in which begins the consummation of the world. John describes the scene:

> I looked again and heard the voices of many angels who surrounded the throne and the living creatures and the elders. They were countless in number, and they cried out in a loud voice:
>
>> "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain
>> to receive power and riches,
>> wisdom and strength, honor and
>> glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:11, 12)

Consider Jesus' prize: power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing. These seven items comprise the most sought-after things in this world. History is soiled with stories of individuals, tribes, and nations who stopped at nothing to possess riches, power, or honor. Countless people have been killed and destroyed and ruthlessly stepped on in the savage, self-seeking pursuit of strength, wisdom, glory, and blessing.

It is paradoxical when we consider that all seven of the most sought-after prizes in the history of our planet were awarded to the one person who lived his life seeking absolutely nothing for himself. Jesus' whole existence was synonymous with sacrificial love. His life demonstrates that when we focus our love upon others, instead of on our own selfish desires, we truly receive. Jesus' road to servanthood is certainly not easy, but it is well worth the investment.

The most miserable people I know are those who invest all their energy serving their own needs and wants. Seeking one's own interests never satisfies one's heart. It is like trying to quench your thirst by drinking salt water; it leaves you thirstier than before. We were created to love. When we love others in a truly healthy manner, we truly live.

St. Paul, recognizing Jesus' ultimate model of servanthood, calls us to follow Jesus' example:

> Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also everyone for those of others.
>
> Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus,
>
>> Who, though he was in the form of
>> God,
>> did not regard equality with God
>> something to be grasped.

> Rather, he emptied himself,
> taking the form of a slave,
> coming in human likeness;
> and found human in appearance,
> he humbled himself,
> becoming obedient to death,
> even death on a cross.
> Because of this, God greatly exalted
>    him
> and bestowed on him the name
> that is above every name,
> that at the name of Jesus
> every knee should bend,
> of those in heaven and on earth and
> under the earth,
> and every tongue confess that
> Jesus Christ is Lord,
> to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:3-11)

The servant leaders place the interests of God and those of others above their own. Likewise, our spiritual maturity advances in proportion to our own willingness to sacrifice our personal desires for the sake of the kingdom of God or those around us.

Rob was a young man who went through our senior high ministry and later came back to serve as an adult leader. He quickly became my right-hand man. As a meeting ended, before I was even aware of what happened, he would organize a group of teens to clean up the room. He was always willing to do anything that was useful, no matter how menial.

My own children watched Rob's example in action. They observed serving him in our home and at the church. One evening my son Michael, then six, looked at me inquisitively and asked, "Dad, is Rob your slave?"

At first I chuckled at the question, but when I looked at Michael, his facial expression was one of dead-seriousness. I then explained to him that Rob was not my slave, but he was a young man who took to heart Jesus' call to be a servant to others. He demonstrated the true meaning of servanthood.

The servant leader does not approach ministry with an attitude of: "I am doing you a favor by *volunteering* my time. You're lucky to have me. I could be doing a lot of other things right now." In reality there are no *volunteers* in the kingdom of God. We are members of God's Family. We have calls, and with those calls come responsibilities to our Father and one another.

In reality there are no *volunteers* in the kingdom of God.

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After dinner in the Mercadante household, we aren't looking for volunteers to clean the table and do the dishes. An outsider might volunteer, but the dishes are one of many basic responsibilities of being a member of the Mercadante family. Our attitudes should be the same as we serve teens in our own parish families. The disciple-making leader has a servant's heart.

## Begin Where Your Parish Is

Not all parish youth ministries start on the same ground. We may have the same destination in mind, but the place where we begin working towards that goal may differ drastically from parish to parish.

The organization in which I serve, *Cultivation Ministries*, was founded for the purpose of aiding parishes in developing fruitful, disciple-making youth ministries. The call originated from my own ten-year experience as a parish youth minister. With the support of my pastor, fellow staff, and parish volunteer youth workers, we grew a youth ministry from fourteen reluctant teens to over five hundred active high schoolers. We experienced great success with over seventy-five adult volunteers, fifty peer ministers, and youth programming extending to almost every day of the week. Our parish youth ministry enjoyed a felicitous "feast" with almost twice the number of registered teens involved in some aspect of our ministry. I was deeply concerned, however, by the youth ministry "famine" in parishes a few miles from our door. Through prayerful discernment, I left my parish youth ministry position at St. John Neumann, co-founded *Cultivation Ministries*, and began to address this famine that gnawed at my heart.

During my first year I began training and consulting for eight local parishes. I modestly estimated that in the first two years I would heroically escort these parishes (whose histories were riddled with youth ministry failures) to a spiritual "about-face," and gloriously lead them in building model, mega-youth ministries.

In retrospect, I was either incredibly naive or suffering from delusions of grandeur. Maybe both. I was shocked to find that these parishes did not immediately respond to my "messianic" program and become clones of the St. John Neumann youth ministry. I had to ask myself why this worked so well in one place and not in another.

I eventually awoke to the realization that each parish has a culture, history, and spiritual heritage that impacts every aspect of parish life. In other words, faith communities share certain values, practices, experiences, and backgrounds. For some parishes, its culture, history, and heritage positively

contribute to the effectiveness of any ministry effort. For instance, a parish that sponsors opportunities for spiritual renewal and fruitfully evangelizes its adult membership will fill its volunteer positions with renewed leaders. Because these parishioners have a personal experience of being evangelized, they are better able to reproduce this experience in others. These leaders are spiritually equipped for ministry.

On the other hand, some parishes have little history of lay involvement and few opportunities for spiritual renewal. Weekend liturgies may be celebrated with the same enthusiasm one might have about facing a root canal procedure at the dentist's office. I have found that parishes that are anemic in their adult evangelistic efforts and overall spiritual renewal need to begin with these types of efforts in order to begin a renewal of parish leadership.

The process of building a disciple-making youth ministry must begin at the place in which the parish presently finds itself. The following steps are helpful:

*Step One: Assess Your Present Condition.* First, ask the question: To what degree is our parish making disciples of our adult members? What kind of evangelistic and spiritual renewal opportunities do we presently have? Who are the adults with a contagious faith, Christian integrity, and a servant's heart at our parish?

As we address each of these questions, we will begin to get an idea of where we must begin. Because it takes a disciple to make a disciple, we will have to start with the assessment of potential leaders.

*Step Two: Develop and Implement a Plan.* The next step involves designing a plan that either builds upon the parish's present abilities to make disciples of its potential leaders or offers a new plan. If we find that our parish offers little in the way of renewal, we may consider hosting an annual retreat that has as its focus the spiritual renewal of adults active in parish ministry. To economize time and effort, renewal efforts may be combined among parish ministries or even more than one parish.

Also, during regular leadership meetings, time should be built in for ongoing faith-building and spiritual formation opportunities. Some parishes offer many renewal opportunities for professional and volunteer ministries. In places such as these, youth ministers should work under the model established by their parish to address the needs of the leaders on their core teams.

*Step Three: Monitor and Evaluate.* Whether we offer spiritual renewal to adults working with teens initiated under the umbrella of the youth ministry program or by the parish at

large, we should always monitor the efforts to see if the renewal is helping to make disciples of the adult leaders. If one type of retreat or form of renewal works better than another, stay with what works, always adapting it so that it aids the leaders in ministry.

Remember, the overall objective is to encourage and develop adult *and* teen leaders who will model discipleship in their words and, more importantly, in their actions.

## Summary

Disciples make disciples. The extent to which our leaders embrace discipleship in their own lives is proportionate to the extent to which we will reproduce disciples in our teens. Like Paul, we must grow to say, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ."

Instead of investing all of our energy in building programs, we would do better to focus our efforts in forming the people who will serve as our leaders. In turn, these leaders will provide powerful visual models to teens that will serve as examples of what it means to be followers of Christ.

Disciples minister from the inside out. They are characterized by a contagious faith that infects others with the love of God. Additionally, they live their faith with integrity. Their words, actions, decisions, and lifestyle are consistent with the principles of God's kingdom. The disciple-maker is a servant. Those who make disciples are not volunteers, but members of God's family, serving God and others with sacrificial love.

Finally, every parish has a culture that affects their ability to produce disciples. We first must assess our present situation. Next, we build and implement a plan that addresses our assets and deficits. Finally, we continually evaluate our plans, making revisions and changes when necessary.

## Application

The resource "Steps for Evangelistic and Spiritual Renewal of Parish Leaders" (page 39) provides a format for overviewing the disciple-making process described in this chapter as related to your parish and ministry.

# Steps for Evangelistic and Spiritual Renewal of Parish Leaders

Directions: Answer the questions under each step as you analyze what is needed for renewal of adults who lead or have the potential to lead teens.

| Step One: Assess Your Present Condition | Step Two: Develop and Implement a Plan | Step Three: Monitor and Evaluate |
|---|---|---|
| Who are parish leaders? | What opportunities are available at the parish for spiritual renewal? | What are some objectives you feel should be the basis of any spiritual renewal effort? |
| Who are potential adults who can lead youth? | | |
| What qualities of discipleship do these adults have? | How can the opportunity for spiritual renewal among youth leaders be incorporated in current parish offerings? | What methods will you employ to monitor and evaluate evangelistic and spiritual renewal opportunities? |
| How are the leaders being renewed spiritually? | What is an opportunity that we, as a youth ministry, could sponsor for adult renewal? | |

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# 3

# CULTIVATING A TEAM OF DISCIPLE-MAKERS

During my early teen years, I became more conscious of my body and my looks, as is typical for most adolescents. Not much liking what my mirror reported back, I assembled a little gym in my basement and began working out five days a week. Among my numerous training goals was the transformation of my quarter barrel belly into a more fashionably attractive abdominal six pack.

One day after scarfing down one of my mother's spaghetti dinners, I felt particularly strong and invincible. I swaggered downstairs alone, and confidently loaded a bar with more weight than I had ever benched before. Slipping under the weight, I hoisted it up and carefully lowered it to my chest. With a sudden burst of strength, I immediately raised it six inches. The following six inches progressed slowly until a foot away from my chest it became an immovable wall of weight. My strength gave out as the crushing mass arrived full-force upon my chest. As I struggled beneath it, the cold iron bar began to sinisterly slide toward my throat. A sense of panic began to overwhelm me when, to my good fortune, my sister's boyfriend arrived downstairs. He rushed towards the bench with an expression that declared "Are you nuts?" He pulled the bar off my chest and yelled, "You *never* lift alone!"

He was right. Weightlifting should be done with others. There are some things we should never do alone, and weightlifting is one of them. Swimming is another, and youth ministry is a third.

## Choosing the Right Leaders

Doing youth ministry alone is not safe, smart, efficient, or effective. And, bottom line, Jesus didn't do it that way. Consider who Jesus is: the omnipotent King of kings, the omniscient Lord of lords! If there was any one person who could have done it on his own, it was Jesus. But he chose to surround

himself with a team to share his work. How much more do we need the support of others?

You may be thinking, "Okay, I get the point. I shouldn't do this alone. But, that's not really the dilemma. The problem isn't so much me wanting to do it alone, as it is trying to find someone—anyone—to join with me!"

There are a few factors when building an effective youth ministry that are absolutely critical to its success. The most immediate and important is the choice of the leadership. Good leadership can transform a mediocre ministry into a phenomenal program. On the other hand, a great or potentially great youth ministry program can be sabotaged by poor leadership, rendering it ineffective and spreading a cloud of disillusionment throughout the parish community. The importance of choosing the right leaders in the beginning cannot be underestimated.

The "any warm body will do" approach to youth ministry recruitment has a proven track record for trouble. Having a pulse and brain wave activity does not adequately qualify a person to work with teens! Too many of us, motivated by desperation, have defaulted into this approach, only to painfully regret it later. The emotional, spiritual, and team energy required to "de-volunteer" someone has the potential to exhaust, exasperate, and even execute a young team.

The first principle for effective youth ministry recruitment is: *Choose our leaders wisely and carefully because they will be the foundation on which our ministry rests.* We must be proactive in our approach to recruitment. We need to make recruiting decisions based on what we determine as best. We cannot simply resign ourselves as victims of circumstances and conditions. Additionally, when it comes to leadership, we cannot be passive, accepting whatever comes as "God's providence." This may seem "spiritual," but it is not very scriptural. Jesus made a very prayerful and proactive choice of his leaders (see Luke 6:12-13).

To reiterate, effective recruitment of adult youth workers is critical to the future success of the ministry. We cannot afford to take it lightly or surrender it to circumstances. To make a significant impact on young people in the future, we need to make a significant investment in time and thought when recruiting and selecting leaders in this initial stage of development.

## The Importance of Prayer in Attracting Good Leaders

Some things never change. Close to 2000 years ago, Jesus said, "the harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few"

*Good leadership can transform a mediocre ministry into a phenomenal program.*

(Matthew 9:37). So often, especially in a ministry to teenagers, we find ourselves short on adult leadership. Most adults, while genuinely concerned about the welfare of teens in their parish, would just as soon repair the church roof as work with adolescents. It is like asking for volunteers to clean the shark tank.

So we humble ourselves and grovel before the parish begging, pleading, and weepingly imploring the congregation for help. After coming up empty-handed we resort to the "tried and true" plan B: threats about the closing down of youth programs and other guilt-inducing manipulation tactics.

When experiencing a shortage of youth workers, begging is admittedly scriptural. Jesus referred to it as the solution to a scarcity of workers in the harvest. He actually exhorts us to beg. And beg we have. The problem is that we have been begging the wrong people. We are not called to beg the potential workers. Jesus said, "Beg the *Lord of the harvest* to send forth laborers" (Matthew 9:38).

We easily can become overwhelmed in light of our lack of youth workers, especially when we consider the enormous needs of our present-day teens. It is precisely at this time we should direct our attention to God in prayer.

Prayer has been an overlooked resource in recruiting leaders in the church today. We have often put all our energy and thought into cleverly and creatively designed recruitment plans. Unfortunately, this approach is not biblical. Jesus made it clear that our first priority and response for the need of more workers is prayer. He taught this (see Matthew 9:37-38) and modeled it (see Luke 6:12-13). Prior to his choosing the twelve apostles, Jesus spent the night in prayer.

Our recruitment needs to begin and end with prayer. God knows our need more than we do. He loves our young people more than we do. God can stir hearts toward action better than we can. Ministry is a matter of call. We cannot attempt to play the Holy Spirit in people's lives, seeking to cleverly persuade them towards action. Our job is to prayerfully present our need to God, and to invite the parishioners to prayerfully discern whether this is God's call in their life, and their charism to the community.

Seeking to follow Jesus' example and exhortation, the second principle for effective recruiting is: *When there is a need for more workers, prayer is our first response and greatest resource.*

## Who Works Best With Youth?

Many people presume the best age group to work with youth is young adults, reasoning that people in their twenties

are not so distant from their own adolescent experience, high on energy, and low on responsibilities. They are developmentally designed and destined to work with teens!

Another opinion is that parents of teenagers are best positioned to work with adolescents. Because youth programming most affects their own children, they are naturally concerned with and deeply invested in developing a worthwhile youth ministry. Additionally, who better understands teenagers' peculiarities than one who is being sanctified and made holy through them!

A third assumption is that senior citizens offer a viable option as youth leaders. Their wisdom, experience, and greater amount of free time are advantages often named. (Oppositely, some may believe that older adults are too distant developmentally and lack the vital energy to work with teens.)

Admittedly, each of these opinions have some validity, yet, none of them taken alone paint the entire picture of an effective leadership team. A best-case scenario for a leadership team would include a variety of people, male and female, old and young, single and married, parents and grandparents.

With little experience of an extended family, the breakdown of the nuclear family, and a more transient society, today's youth need a greater variety of role models in their lives. They need to see what it means to follow Christ from many different ages and states in life.

Additionally, a youth ministry team benefits by the experiences of many different age groups and vocations. For example, where a senior citizen might not be able (or want) to lead a game of volleyball, he or she might have an advantage in time, experience, and wisdom. A young adult might be just the opposite—bubbling with energy and developmentally and culturally relevant, but possibly lacking in experience. A parent of an adolescent might lack time, but offer great insight into what teens are like to live with. An ideal team would be comprised of a variety of different age groups, vocations, gifts, and perspectives, making a balanced mix.

A third principle for youth ministry recruitment is: *There is no single ideal age or description of a youth ministry team, except one that includes balance and variety.*

Not only do we often have misconceptions about the *age* of effective youth leaders, we might also carry a distorted picture of the *character qualities* of those who minister with youth. One extreme might be, "If you are still breathing and crazy enough to do it, then you're in!" The opposite extreme contends, "You had best be canonized, or at least in the beatification process. Don't apply unless your salutation is 'Saint'."

I want to offer a more realistic perspective. The following are some important characteristics of the potential youth leader:

### Availability

We need adults who either have the time or are willing to make the time to be involved. The person who is too busy and over-committed will be unable to devote the needed energy to do effective ministry. Availability, however, is more than just having the time to schedule for meetings. It is a disposition or attitude that says to teens, "I am here for you. You are important to me. When you need me, I will be here."

Availability, however, must be appropriate, healthy, and balanced. We can never advocate the neglect of one's own family for the sake of ministry. A person who is married with six kids, has a sixty-hour-a-week job, coaches soccer, baseball, and wrestling, leads the Boy Scout troop, and is pastoral council chairperson and a choir member need not apply! A good general rule of thumb is that volunteers be involved in only one parish ministry at a time. This approach helps prevent burn out, and allows people to devote enough time in one area, creating greater potential for success.

### Authenticity

Let's face it, for most teens we are cultural relics of the prehistoric past. At best, we are one cultural step behind. If we're wearing it, it's out. If we're saying it, it was last year's colloquialism. If we're listening to it, it's now being played instrumentally on elevators. *And that's the way it's supposed to be.*

Adolescents seek to distinguish themselves from mainstream, adult society by being different in dress, music, and language. We had our turn and it is over. We are now adults. Teens do not want us to be like them. In actuality, when we start to look, talk, and act like adolescents they know something is not quite right. It is like spotting someone sporting a toupee. We may not notice it at first glance. But, the funny thing about toupees is that there is always a second glance. We know there is something not quite right and we strain our necks a second time to figure it out. It is not the toupee; most toupees are quite a slick, thick, and well-groomed plot of hair. The problem is that it isn't *their* plot of hair, and we know it. Likewise, teens can spot a phony with relative ease. They are not seeking a pseudo-adult in teen clothing. We will relate best to young people when we are authentically ourselves. Authenticity means being who we are, being real. It means being an adult if we happen to be one.

We can never advocate the neglect of one's own family for the sake of ministry.

## Healthy Love for Teens

When I was a small child I always made sure I was near those adults who I sensed loved me. Somehow, I was just an arm's length away from them. That was not by chance. On the contrary, it was quite intentional. I always seemed to feel better around those people. They laughed at my jokes, poked and wrestled with me, and took an interest in what I was doing.

Now, on the other hand, I remember a woman who I sensed did not like me. She preferred my cousin over me and made no bones about it. Being in the same county with her was too close for me. She seemed ugly to me. I remember her as having an angry, contorted expression on her face even when she was happy. She had thick horn-rimmed glasses with small beady eyes behind them. On her gigantic nose she had a large wart with three protruding black hairs growing from its creviced tip. It was amazing how much she resembled the sinister features of those animated villains I watched on Saturday mornings.

Now, in reality, she did not really look that way (at least that is what my parents tell me), but she did to me. It is a funny thing, no matter how old we get, we like to be around people who genuinely love us, and we do not like being around those we perceive not to like us. Teens are no different. The face of one who loves us is always more attractive than the face of one who does not. Teens need to be surrounded by faces of people who love them.

It is essential that the volunteer youth worker have an altruistic love for the adolescent. Our motivation should be rooted in a sincere care and other-centered concern for teens, not a co-dependency-inspired need to be needed. Sadly, youth ministry has a track record for attracting adults who need teens' approval, loyalty, and love more than they are able to give it. Youth ministry is not the place to work out old wounds and hurts. That can be better done through counseling.

Our love cannot be co-dependent, or coerced. It is important that young people do not think that we view them as a pain, or a necessary source of suffering for time off in purgatory. Likewise, when we are with them, we do not want to leave them with the impression that we are there only to work off our community service hour sentence. The Apostle Peter wrote, "Tend the flock of God in your midst, not by constraint but willingly, as God would have it, not for shameful profit but eagerly" (1 Peter 5:2). Teens, like anyone else, are naturally attracted to those who they perceive genuinely love them. It means that we respect and appreciate them for who they are individually and developmentally.

### Ability to Communicate With Youth

Youth ministry may not be our call if we break out in hives when we are around teens. A youth worker should feel comfortable talking with teens and open to expanding on communication skills he or she already possesses. Our ability to communicate to young people will be the vehicle in which we express our love and concern. Being comfortable talking with adolescents, however, does not imply we are polished, professional communicators, or ready to open an adolescent counseling center. We may not be all that confident, but we are open to learn. We may not always know what to say, but we are willing to be present. It simply means that we are at home with teenagers and we are comfortable with talking and listening to them.

### Growing Faith

While considering the purchase of a computer I encountered a new salesman who knew very little about his product. Within a few minutes of conversation I realized I knew far more about the model he was trying to sell than he did. That left me a bit insecure because I did not know all that much. Consequently, I did not buy the computer from him. Likewise, to give away our faith we have to have some personal knowledge and experience with it. We cannot speak of Jesus as some remote, historical figure. Ministry implies that we have a growing relationship with Christ and live a Christian lifestyle. Our faith is the substance of what we communicate. We cannot take a young person where we have never journeyed ourselves. Again, this does not imply that we have a "St." before our name; it means that we are spiritually healthy, open, and growing.

### Sense of Calling

Youth ministry is not a matter of volunteering time as much as it is a matter of discerning and obeying God's call. We need to be called by the Lord for our ministry to be truly authentic. Very few of us receive a lightening bolt and an audible voice directing us in what to do. Most of us operate out of a sense of conviction, rooted in a prayerful relationship with Christ. The potential youth worker must sense God's calling to serve the church in this manner. This call should not only be prayerfully discerned by each potential youth worker, but also confirmed by the pastoral leadership.

## Skills for Recruiting Youth Workers

Finding potential youth workers with the above characteristics requires both positive attitudes and practical effort

on our part. We need to be enthusiastic, realize that recruiting is an ongoing task, and appeal to different motivations. Let's look at these important recruiting skills in greater detail.

### Be Enthusiastic

Enthusiasm! Without it there is little chance others will want to join us in our work. Think about it. We are combining the two scariest things known to the average adult Catholic—working with teenagers (technically known as adolesceaphobia) and sharing our faith (technically known as evangelphobia). If we are not excited about it, we cannot expect others to be.

The word *enthusiasm* literally means "in God or possessed by God." If there are any people who ought to be enthusiastic, it ought to be us, the followers of Christ. We should convey a deep sense of excitement about who we are and what we are all about. Like individuals, every group has an image of itself. People with a poor self-image are sometimes very difficult to be around. And likewise, if a group has a really negative image of itself, it will not be very attractive to others. People will say, "I don't want to be a part of this group; they don't seem to like being with each other or enjoy what they are doing."

We do not want to possess or convey a poor group image by being negative or pessimistic. We don't want to start the year saying, "It's September and we've been hit with heavy attrition again." Or, "Working with teenagers is a bear." Or, "Sure, it's a thankless job, but somebody has to make the sacrifice and minister to those rebellious adolescents."

We do not want to approach recruiting from a negative standpoint. People will walk away feeling guilty—and I mean walk away; they won't be interested in joining our sinking ship. A youth ministry will never soar to the heights of eagles if it is being promoted by a flock of turkeys.

Instead, we need to be enthusiastic as we go about recruiting. Enthusiasm does not mean we are in denial over the difficulties that we are surrounded by, but, rather, we are focusing on the grace of God to provide the wisdom, resources, and strength to bring about great things. Enthusiasm is knowing that the omnipotent God who created the universe with a single thought is on our side. As someone once said, "if one tenth of what we believe is true, then we ought to be ten times more excited than what we are." If we are still struggling with being enthusiastic, then take to heart the inspirational words of football coach Vince Lombardi, who said, "If you aren't fired by enthusiasm, you will be fired with enthusiasm." So be enthusiastic!

> If there are any people who ought to be enthusiastic, it ought to be us, the followers of Christ.

### Recognize Recruiting Is an Ongoing Task

The football team that excels during their season is one who prepares in the off-season. Throughout the year players continue to lift weights and train for endurance. A team loses unrecoverable ground when players sluggishly meander into the season overweight and out of shape. Likewise, recruitment cannot be just an annual autumn activity. We need to keep in good shape by approaching potential youth workers throughout the year. When we observe in others qualities that are assets in youth work, we may want to say, "You have the kind of faith and disposition that would really make an impact on teens. Have you ever considered working with youth?" Recruiting is an all-year task.

With the birth of our fourth child my family outgrew our car. So, we began to consider the purchase of a mini-van. While researching the different models, I looked for mini-vans on the road as I traveled. I was astounded at what I observed. It seemed like every other car out there was a mini-van! I never noticed them before, primarily because I was never looking for them. Similarly, there are plenty of potential youth workers all around us, and we will never notice them if we aren't actively looking.

Effective recruiting is a team effort. Each youth worker must share the responsibility of growing the ministry by enthusiastically inviting others to join us in our vision. We must recognize there are people all around us who have the charism, faith, and personalities that could make a difference in the life of a teen.

### Appeal to Different Motivations

People have different motivations for involving themselves in ministry. Most individuals are primarily motivated by one of three social needs: achievement, affiliation, or influence. A good recruiting approach will highlight the benefits of participating from each of these perspectives. Here are some ways to do that:

*Achievement-oriented* people derive great satisfaction in setting and reaching goals. They tend to be very practical and detailed in their approach to life. They are no-nonsense and business-like. They do not want to be bored with theory; they want to get to the bottom line: "What are we going to do?"

When appealing to the achiever, it is important to communicate the practical activities in your ministry and how they relate to the overall objectives of the program. We need to offer these individuals roles that have specific tasks attached to them.

*Affiliation-oriented* people get involved with and enjoy ministry because they like interacting with others; they value

human companionship. These individuals find it very satisfying to be affiliated with and belong to the youth ministry team. They enjoy the relational aspect of ministry.

For potential youth workers with this motivation, stress how the youth ministry team operates as a small-base Christian community, or how it is able to foster relationships with teens. Affiliation-oriented people will be more motivated by roles that place them in the middle of human interaction and relationships.

*Impact-oriented* people are primarily motivated by the desire to make an impact. "We want to make a difference" is their motto. They do not want to waste time on insignificant or trivial matters. Their bottom line is: Are lives being touched through our efforts?

When appealing to the impactors, we must help them see how their contribution can affect the lives of teens. Sharing stories of how teens' lives were changed through the influence of adult leaders would catch their interest. Impact-oriented people need to be offered roles that provide opportunities for them to effect change in their lives and the lives of others.

It is natural to think that everyone will want to join the youth ministry team for the same reasons as we did. We tend to recruit from the need that essentially motivates us. For instance, an impactor may emphasize to others the eternal difference the ministry is making in teens' lives. An affiliator may yawn through such an appeal until he hears about the wonderful, caring community of which the other is a part. A fruitful recruitment campaign will therefore, give voice to all three of these approaches. Most people who join groups will be primarily motivated by one, or in some cases two, of these needs. When we explain the ministry in light of these social needs, potential leaders will hear what we do in their own "language."

Be careful, however, to be truthful in your presentation. It can be easy to get carried away in appealing to the different motivations and lose sight of reality. We cannot passionately persuade the affiliator with dramatic stories of Christian community when we know our team is riddled with unreconcilable conflict and dissent. We must be truthful in what we can offer.

## Basic Recruiting Approaches

There are two basic approaches to recruiting that are applicable to potential youth workers of each kind of motivation: *selective recruiting* and *general recruiting*. To understand these approaches it might be best to describe them in fishing terms.

Selective recruiting is the angler's approach. We target the species of fish we hope to catch by the kind of rod, bait, and presentation we employ. On the other hand, general recruiting can be likened to commercial fishing. Send your boat out to the deep water and drag your nets. Let's look at each of these approaches in greater detail.

## Selective Recruiting

Selective recruiting is a targeted approach. It is the process of identifying known individuals who possess the necessary gifts, faith, and energies for youth ministry. In other words, we surface the names of potential leaders and initiate contact.

Selective recruitment begins by producing a list of individuals in the parish who are potentially qualified to serve as youth workers. This is done by consulting with parish staff, past youth workers, parents, teenagers, and other key members of the parish. Once an exhaustive list is created, each person is individually contacted. This can be done by phone, letter, in person, or any combination of the three.

Listed below are five sources for securing names based on the selective approach:

*1. Parish staff*—Communication among staff members is key. Arrange to speak at a parish staff meeting to share the vision of youth ministry. Approaching the staff will help ensure we do not recruit people from high involvement roles in other ministries within the parish, and in the process damage relationships.

Prior to a scheduled meeting, distribute directories to each staff member. Include with it a written request to review the directory and highlight those individuals they think might have the necessary skills to work with youth. At the staff meeting, discuss possible candidates and compile a list of potential people. A round-table discussion with parish staff members is an essential part of increasing ownership and support for youth ministry.

*2. Youth workers or catechists*—The adult leaders involved in ongoing youth ministry or religious education may be able to identify other adults who have previously assisted in their programs who might be ready to expand their leadership roles. They may also be able to recommend former students who are now adults.

*3. Parents of adolescents*—Getting feedback from parents of teens (individually or through listening sessions) can serve three functions. First, the feedback can be used as a vehicle for assessing the needs of parents in regards to youth programming. Second, parents can be invited to become involved in

youth ministry. Third, parents may be able to identify other adults who might be capable and willing to work with teens.

*4. Long-time parishioners*—Every parish has a group of "pillar leaders." These are individuals with a long history of parish leadership and commitment. Long-time parishioners have a unique perspective that may be very helpful in understanding the past history and present needs of the parish. Furthermore, because of their vast experience and relationships with people in the community, they may be able to identify a number of prospective youth workers. This group can be extremely helpful when a parish has a new pastor and staff members. If nothing else, they will appreciate the fact that we value their experience, wisdom, and longtime membership in the parish.

*5. Youth*—Teens should be asked for their input on youth leaders. In many ways, who knows better? Compile a list of names the teens suggest and make contact with those adults by phone or mail. Without exception, adults who are recommended by teens feel quite honored and have difficulty refusing a request to take a role in youth ministry. We may even consider having teens contact these individuals themselves.

In a selective approach, the individuals identified are, for the most part, known quantities. They have been identified because they have leadership experience, potential, or possess the needed abilities. Most likely, they are "proven" people. Therefore, the risk factor is lowered and there is less concern over the possibility of de-volunteering or "firing" them.

Dealing with a person who has slipped into leadership who is not emotionally or spiritually healthy can be like dealing with a "team tapeworm" who devours all the group's energy and resources. Selective recruiting reduces the possibility of this occurring.

However, not every qualified person in the parish can be identified by another. In most parishes, it is likely that only twenty percent of the registered parishioners are involved beyond Sunday liturgy. A selective approach usually identifies only the names of this minority. Subsequently, all parish ministries are pooling from this same group. The total selective yield might be slim. The "Achilles heel" of the selective approach is that gifted individuals can be overlooked and new parishioners skipped over entirely.

Another drawback is that this approach could be perceived as an effort to gather only an elite, specially chosen group. Good people may feel they have been snubbed and considered not good enough to be part of the youth ministry

"clique." This can cause resentment on the part of those who were not invited.

### General Recruitment

General recruiting is more of a shotgun approach. It is the process of making known to the entire parish the need for adult youth workers. This approach does not distinguish between who receives an invitation and who does not. Every adult in the parish is considered a potential youth worker.

The purpose is to make a broad appeal, reaching as many people as possible. The following methods are common to a general approach:

- ✔ A newsletter sent to all families in the parish
- ✔ A homily devoted to adolescent ministry and recruitment
- ✔ Flyers posted around the church
- ✔ Mass and bulletin announcements
- ✔ General "Time and Talent" forms as part of a stewardship campaign

With general recruiting, it is also wise to interview potential candidates. Though this process can demand a considerable amount of time, the value of it cannot be underestimated. A one-to-one interview provides an opportunity to ensure that the interested person understands and is ready for the position.

Additionally, interviewing could be used when the pastor or parish leadership has some potential concerns or hesitations regarding an interested person. It is always best to deal with these kinds of issues directly and immediately. As uncomfortable as this task is, we must resist the temptation to close our eyes and hope for the best when we suspect difficulty.

The following situations and characteristics should warrant concern with regard to being involved in the youth ministry:

- ✔ Having present marriage and family difficulties
- ✔ Emotionally or spiritually unhealthy
- ✔ Overextended and over-committed
- ✔ Emotionally immature
- ✔ Having an immoral lifestyle
- ✔ Possessing hidden agendas (e.g., "I will teach these kids what the church is *really* about.")

Like selective recruiting, general recruiting has both its positive and negative sides. The benefits of general recruiting are usually the deficits of the selective approach, and vice-versa.

On the plus side, general recruitment reaches a greater number of possible volunteers than selective recruitment. Those gifted "unknowns" are on equal footing with the "knowns." There is less chance of missing qualified potential youth workers. Also, general recruitment builds a strong parish awareness and ownership of the youth ministry by all. Visibility is a key to both teen and adult involvement.

However, like drag netting, the haul may bring forth both desirable and undesirable results. It is not uncommon to attract people who lack the necessary gifts, lifestyle, or disposition for youth ministry. There is the greater probability of finding ourselves stuck with the unpleasant task of de-volunteering someone later. This procedure is typically messy and distracting for a youth ministry team.

Finally, the general approach is broad, somewhat generic, and impersonal. Because it lacks a personal touch, it is easier to ignore or not seriously consider.

I would not recommend doing an exclusively general approach. I would suggest either an exclusively selective appeal, or a combination of the two approaches. If any case, you should possess the gumption to "fire" volunteers if they are not suited for youth ministry.

## Job Description of a Youth Leader

Normal people (technically speaking, there aren't any normal people in youth ministry) are more inclined to commit to a role when expectations are clearly stated. Most of us are wary of positions that seem ambiguous or vague. We want to know what we are getting ourselves into before we sign the dotted line. A practical way to provide this clarity is through the development of specific job descriptions.

Job descriptions outline the objective, tasks, and responsibilities of key roles such as "Peer Ministry Team Director" or "Director of Communications." It is best to design a job description that is realistic in today's busy world. Most people are not interested in a second full-time, volunteer job. So, instead of listing one position with ten tasks, have two positions under the same job description that evenly divide the tasks. Also, I think an important key to attracting potential leaders is to offer short-term rather than open-ended commitments. We are more apt to step in and think, "Well, this I can manage."

The following are helpful components of a job description:

*Position Title*—The name or title of the role (e.g., Peer Ministry Director, Social Director, Discipleship Leader).

*Desired Characteristics*—A listing of gifts and skills that are needed to perform the role well. Examples might be organizational skills, discussion-leading skills, ability to share your faith.

*Purpose*—A brief statement or general summary of what is to be accomplished through the position.

*General Responsibilities*—Details the specific duties and functions of the role.

The job description might also describe the specific *training* one receives to prepare for and function completely in the position. Also, a clear indication of the *time commitment* required to fill the role is suggested. For example, answers to the questions: What is the duration of the commitment? How many hours per week or month might it involve?

## Summary

Like swimming and weightlifting, youth ministry was never meant to be done alone. Good youth ministry is team-based. Our effectiveness is multiplied when we utilize the gifts and skills of many leaders as opposed to relying on one charismatic individual or couple.

Assembling a team of adult leaders should not be left to chance. It is essential that we be proactive in our approach to recruitment. We must choose our leaders wisely and carefully because they will be the foundation on which our ministry rests.

When experiencing a shortage of leaders in light of an overwhelming need, Jesus instructed us to pray that God will send forth workers into the harvest. Our first response to recruitment should always be prayer.

A team of youth workers is not necessarily a homogenized group. When recruiting, we should seek to attract people from different age groups, cultures, genders, and backgrounds. What they should have in common is a disposition of availability, a sense of authenticity, a healthy love for teens, a comfort communicating with youth, a growing faith, and a sense of calling.

Recruiting is an ongoing task that should be carried on with great enthusiasm. People are attracted to winning teams and not attracted to losing teams. Additionally, people hear God's call in light of their personal gifts and dispositions. We should appeal to potential leaders in light of three social drives: achievement, affiliation, and influence.

There are two different approaches to recruiting leaders. The first is the *selective* approach, which identifies potential leaders and personally invites them to be a part of the youth ministry team. The second is the *general* approach, which

## Application

Examples of job descriptions for various youth ministry positions are listed on pages 57-61.

makes no distinction in potential candidates. In the general approach, everyone is invited. Many people combine the approaches, but to do so we must be willing to say no to those who are not suited for youth ministry.

Finally, most people like to know exactly what they are getting themselves into when they commit to a job. Designing job descriptions that detail what a person does in a role is a helpful way to accomplish this.

# Practical Options for Incorporating Prayer

**The following options are some practical ways prayer can be incorporated into efforts at recruiting adult leaders.**

1. Ask all pastoral leaders to schedule personal prayer to "beg the Lord of the harvest to send laborers," especially mentioning the needs for youth ministry.

2. Hold an evening prayer service with a group of parents to pray for the entire recruitment process.

3. Contact a few known "prayer warriors" (individuals who are committed to regular prayer). Ask them to organize a group of ten or more volunteers to pray for the recruitment process. Request they individually spend ten minutes a day praying for this need for the next thirty days.

4. Incorporate the intentions for the youth ministry and recruitment process into the daily and weekend Mass/bulletin announcements and the prayers of the faithful.

5. Acquire a list of homebound parishioners' names. By phone or letter make contact with them, requesting their daily prayer for the youth ministry recruiting process.

6. Contact leaders of parish Bible studies, prayer groups, and the like. Request that they add this intention during their meetings.

# Director of Communications
# Job Description

To ensure that consistent and pertinent information regarding the youth ministry is effectively communicated to the youth, their parents, potential youth workers, the parish family, and the outside community.

## DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS

✔ Organizational skills

✔ Writing skills

Helpful, but not necessary:

✔ Layout knowledge

✔ Computer skills (Desktop publishing, word processing, graphics)

## GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

✔ To coordinate and oversee all communication efforts (from design to execution) of the youth ministry to the youth, parents, potential youth workers, parish, and outside community.

✔ To develop effective plans to publicize and promote programs, meetings, events, and activities through the use of various available mediums.

✔ To create a positive image awareness of the youth ministry to young people, parents, the parish, and the larger community.

✔ To inform the parish of the direction, plans, the reason behind the plans, and progress of the youth ministry.

✔ To educate and inform the parish on relevant youth-related issues, statistics, trends, etc.

✔ To motivate and organize the involvement of both students and adults in the communication efforts of the youth ministry.

✔ To ensure that all communication is done in sincerity and truthfulness, and with high quality.

✔ To be an active member of the youth ministry planning team.

✔ To plan and oversee the communications budget.

✔ To maintain a current database of all eligible teens.

# Peer Ministry Team Director
# Job Description

To direct the Peer Ministry Team through community building, spiritual formation, leadership development, and the organization of ministry opportunities.

## DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS

✔ Organizational skills

✔ Ability to motivate young people

✔ Healthy spirituality

✔ Comfortable in sharing one's own faith

## GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

✔ To foster the growth of community and effective team work.

✔ To foster the spiritual growth of the peer ministers.

✔ To help develop the leadership potential and giftedness of the peer ministers.

✔ To help foster creativity, responsibility, ownership, and investment in the peer ministers.

✔ To help organize the Peer Ministry Team outreach, evangelistic, and service opportunities.

✔ To ensure that the peer ministers receive the necessary training for ministry.

✔ To enforce the covenant agreement or lifestyle contract.

✔ To facilitate meetings.

✔ To work together with the Director of Large Group Evangelization in planning and organizing the outreach meetings.

✔ To collaborate and communicate with the youth ministry planning team concerning the direction and plans for the peer ministry (Member of Planning Team).

✔ To plan and oversee Peer Ministry Team scheduling and budgeting.

# Director of Large Group Evangelization
# Job Description

## PURPOSE

To plan, direct, and oversee Large Group Outreach programming.

## DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS

✔ Organizational skills

✔ An appreciation and love for evangelization

✔ Creativity

✔ Ability to work well with others

## GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

✔ To effectively assess, plan, design, organize, execute, and evaluate Large Group Outreach programming.

✔ To work together with the Peer Ministry Team in planning and organizing the meetings.

✔ To recruit, train, organize, and supervise Large Group Outreach adult team leaders, the planning team, and the Competition Coordinator.

✔ To collaborate and communicate with the youth ministry planning team concerning the direction and plans for the upcoming meetings (Member of Planning Team).

✔ To work together with the Director of Communication for effective promotion, publicity, etc. of the Large Group Outreach.

✔ To resource the planning team with speakers, skits, activities, videos, etc.

✔ To ensure that the meetings are rooted in the mission of the youth ministry, based on the needs of young people, and in sync with the vision and objectives of Large Group Outreach programming.

✔ To ensure the development of a warm climate and effective content for the meetings.

✔ To plan and oversee Large Group Outreach scheduling and budgeting.

# Large Group Evangelization Team Leader
# Job Description

## PURPOSE

To facilitate discussion, organize game and activity participation, motivate attendance and enthusiasm, and evangelize young people through large group outreach.

## DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS

✔ Discussion leading skills

✔ Ability to motivate students

✔ Personable/comfortable with youth

✔ Desire to share faith

✔ Like to have fun

## GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

✔ Facilitate discussions.
✔ Build a warm, accepting, and enthusiastic climate.
✔ Share your faith with students before, during, and after meetings.
✔ Build morale, ownership, and a sense of excitement in the group.
✔ Organize the team for games and activities.
✔ Call and/or send postcards reminding students of meetings.
✔ Motivate students to bring friends to the meetings.