

Connecting Young Adults to Catholic Parishes

Best Practices in Catholic Young Adult Ministry

Committee for Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Washington, D.C.

The document *Connecting Young Adults to Catholic Parishes: Best Practices in Catholic Young Adult Ministry* was developed as a resource by the Committee for Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). It was reviewed by the committee chairman, Archbishop Roger Schwietz, OMI, and has been authorized for publication by the undersigned.

Msgr. David J. Malloy, STD
General Secretary, USCCB

Cover image: Rob Porazinski/Photodisc/Getty Images.

First printing, March 2010

ISBN 978-1-57455-546-2

Copyright © 2010, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright holder.

Contents

Preface	vii
Introduction	ix
Chapter 1: Creating a Young Adult–Responsive Church	1
Chapter 2: Prayer and Spirituality	15
Chapter 3: Catechesis and Young Adult Ministry	35
Chapter 4: Discernment and Vocation	61
Chapter 5: Community Life and Pastoral Care	85
Chapter 6: Evangelization and Young Adults	103
Chapter 7: Young Adults and Liturgy	123
Chapter 8: Leadership Development	143
Chapter 9: Justice and Service with Young Adults	159
Chapter 10: Forming Faith Communities of Young Adults	185
Chapter 11: Young Adults and Families	203
Chapter 12: Young Adult Ministry: Hispanic/Latino Perspectives	227
Chapter 13: Taking the Next Steps	241
Appendix: History of Ministry with Young Adults: A National Catholic Perspective	249
Acknowledgments	255
About the Authors	257
Index	261

Preface

In *Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults*,¹ published in 1996, the Catholic bishops of the United States outlined three invitations and four goals for young adult ministry. The pastoral plan invited young adults to holiness, community, and service. The four goals were framed in terms of connecting: with Jesus, with the Church, with the mission of the Church in the world, and with peers.

This book, *Connecting Young Adults to Catholic Parishes: Best Practices in Catholic Young Adult Ministry*, builds upon the theme of connecting by sharing the lived reality and experiences of many people who were involved in young adult ministry throughout the years preceding and following the publication of *Sons and Daughters of the Light*. *Connecting Young Adults to Catholic Parishes* is designed to be a resource to enable all parishes across the United States to become “young adult user-friendly.”

Much research, reflecting, writing, rewriting, editing, and re-editing have gone into the production of this book. These pages attempt to capture the reality of so many people who have shared their experiences in young adult ministry. This book also draws upon the expertise of the staff from the Center for Ministry Development (CMD), as well as the board of directors and members of the National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association (NCYAMA), who continue to serve as a vital resource in the field of young adult ministry.

Without wishing to slight the countless numbers of people who have implemented the invitations and goals of *Sons and Daughters of the Light* with much heart and dedication, we would be remiss in not mentioning Fr. Charles Pfeffer and Sr. Diane Guy, SND, in particular. Both were leaders in the field of young adult ministry who contributed much. Both have been called home to our God, and we remember them with fondness for their invaluable insight and love for young adult ministry.

It is our hope that *Connecting Young Adults to Catholic Parishes* becomes a valuable tool for all parishes to use in strengthening their ministry to young adults. Without the giftedness of our young adults, our parishes would lack the energy and vitality and insight that make them the strong communities they are called to be.

¹ See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1996).

In meeting you, the young adult members of the Church, we are more aware of your capability to love and serve. We invite you to continue to give of yourself, your time, your energies, and your talents for the good of others. We will be praying that the Holy Spirit guide you and the Church as together we grow in the love of Jesus Christ.²

Archbishop Roger Schwietz, OMI
Chair, Committee for Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth

Introduction

What would our Catholic parishes be like if no young adults were present? Parishes certainly would not be as life-giving or dynamic. Young adults give to the Church their own unique way of looking at faith and life, their idealism that is tempered by real-life experiences, and their passions and dreams for themselves and for the world. Young adults are a vital part of the intergenerational faith community. They provide energy and hope to older adults, asking their elders the “why” of the Catholic faith in holy and healthy ways. They serve as role models and mentors for adolescents and children who look up to them.

Young adults are new parents searching for ways to share faith with their little ones. They are newly married couples learning what it means to live a sacramental married life. They are single adults seeking a vocation or embracing single life. And they are young priests and sisters and brothers who are living out their call to ordained or consecrated life.

The variety of young adults in the Church is incredible. Young adults are factory workers and executives, college students and soldiers, employed workers and the unemployed. Some are career-driven; others are still searching for their careers; some are in the military; some are migrant workers; a small number are in prisons or rehab centers. Today's young adults represent the most culturally diverse generation ever seen in the United States. They include the wealthy, the middle-class, and the poor. And they may or may not be engaged in faith communities.

The Church needs these young adults, just as they need the Church. The mutuality of this need provides Catholic parishes with tremendous opportunities. A pastor in Omaha, Nebraska, greeted a young woman after Mass and personally welcomed her to the parish, not suspecting that in a few years she would be a member of the parish pastoral council. A young man with a high-powered job in the business world gave it up to fill the hunger in his heart, not anticipating that his choice would change the lives of hundreds of young adults and hundreds of pastors whom he would train in Catholic leadership.

Young adults contribute to the richness of parish life, but they may not automatically connect with, or stay connected with, the Church in the way generations before them did. It takes a conscious effort on the part of each community of faith to welcome the gifts and meet the needs of the young adults who live within their boundaries.

PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

This book, *Connecting Young Adults to Catholic Parishes: Best Practices in Catholic Young Adult Ministry*, was developed to help faith communities implement *Sons and Daughters of the Light*, the pastoral plan issued by the Catholic bishops of the United States to promote ministry with young adults.¹ *Connecting Young Adults to Catholic Parishes* seeks to help parishes make a better connection with young adults. It is the result of years of vision development and of action by young adults and by those who walk with them on the journey of faith. This book is meant for all those whose ministries touch the lives of young adults, particularly in parishes. It provides strategies for being more responsive to the needs and the gifts of young adults in specific aspects of parish life—and then in the entire Catholic community.

This book complements *Young Adult Works*, the five-binder comprehensive resource developed by the Center for Ministry Development through its Ministry with Young Adults: A National Catholic Initiative (“the Initiative”), which provided specific programs and resources focused on ministry to and with young adults.² *Connecting Young Adults to Catholic Parishes* goes further by focusing on making parishes more responsive to young adults and by encouraging the integration of all young adults into Catholic communities of faith. This book helps parishes that strive to be more young adult-responsive to (1) identify what they are already doing to provide services to young adults, (2) assess how responsive they are to young adults, (3) make changes to become more responsive, and (4) offer particular programs and resources to meet the unique needs of young adults. Only then can parishes credibly invite young adults into their communities, welcome them unconditionally, and challenge them to take the initiative for making ministry with their peers the best it can be.

The first chapter of the book, “Creating a Young Adult-Responsive Church,” is meant for all ministries. Each succeeding chapter focuses on a particular aspect of church life as it relates to young adults and includes real-life examples of successful ministry with them. Experts in ministry with young adults from across the country, many of them young adults themselves, share their insights into how the various elements of ministry with young adults can be developed more strongly in positive, creative, and faithful ways. Most chapters include

-
- 1 See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1996).
 - 2 See Ronald Bagley, CJM, John Roberto, Susan Stark, and Joan Weber, eds., *Young Adult Works* (Naugatuck, CT: Center for Ministry Development [CMD], 1997).

a special section at the end, “The Campus Connection,” which explores the chapter’s topic in the context of campus ministry. Finally, the concluding chapter, “Taking the Next Steps,” summarizes the Initiative team’s projections for the future and is helpful to all ministries. You may wish to read the first and the last chapter, and then other chapters as needed for your particular ministry.

In many chapters, the general issues raised are also addressed through the specific lenses of culture and cultural diversity. In addition to observations about ministry with young adults from African American and Asian/Pacific Islander communities, many segments throughout the book (including Chapter 12, “Young Adult Ministry: Hispanic/Latino Perspectives”) give special attention to ministry with Hispanic/Latino young adults. In the year 2000, Hispanics/Latinos accounted for more than 45 percent of Catholics under the age of thirty in the United States³—and for more than 35 percent of Catholics of all ages in the United States.⁴ Those numbers are expected only to grow over the next decades.

While many parishes may never be able to offer comprehensive ministry to their young adults—due to demographics, lack of resources, or other factors—all parishes can be more responsive to young adults. This book is for everyone working in church ministry who recognizes the gift that young adults are to the Church, as well as the urgency of meeting them in the context of their lives, welcoming their gifts, and supporting them on the journey of faith.

Ultimately, ministry with young adults must and will continue to grow and be refined by young adults themselves—not merely by those who minister to and with them. May this resource provide inspiration and encouragement for the journey.

3 See Instituto Fe y Vida Research and Resource Center, *Changing the Face of Ministry with Catholic Hispanic Youth and Young Adults* (Stockton, CA: Instituto Fe y Vida).

4 See www.usccb.org/hispanicaffairs and the U.S. Census Bureau.