

THE COMPREHENSIVE YOUTH MINISTRY MODEL

The Canadian Certificate in Youth Ministry Studies Program is grounded in the Comprehensive Youth Ministry Model. Discover the particulars of this model through the following headings:

1. A Vision for Youth Ministry

Changing times demand new approaches. What worked in one generation does not necessarily guarantee success in the next generation. This is especially true in ministry with youth. Every generation of leaders in ministry with youth is confronted with the same challenge: to discern the changing needs and life situations of youth and their families and reinvent their vision and strategies. Given the speed of change in our time, the need to reinvent our approach to ministry with youth is particularly pressing.

Research on adolescent developmental needs and assets, so necessary for healthy growth, and the social changes affecting young people give us a basis for developing new approaches and strategies. Consider this brief list of the social changes affecting young people today:

1. Changing Family Life: the increase in diversity of family structures including blended families and single-parent families; the reality of dual career families; the busyness and stress of contemporary family life
2. Changing Economics: the rapidly changing economic scene causing unemployment, career dislocation, and financial stress; the growing number of families living in poverty
3. Changing communities: the concern for the quality of schooling; the concern for safe communities, especially in the face of violence and gangs; fragmentation and competition among community organizations designed to serve youth (schools, religious organizations, youth organizations); diminished funding for community organizations serving youth.
4. Changing Culture: the multicultural nature of our society; the increasing diversity of value systems and lifestyles; the increasing impact of all forms of media and the images and messages they communicate

We need a model to guide our thinking and planning for this new generation of youth and their families. What essential characteristics should a model of youth ministry include?

1. It must promote holistic growth. We need a model of youth ministry that corresponds to a contemporary understanding of adolescent development and faith growth. Specifically one that promotes the internal assets and faith life of youth, while strengthening the external, community supports for positive youth development. We need a model that attends to a wide spectrum of youth needs and that is also attuned to the distinct developmental and social needs of young and older adolescents.
2. It must be family and community centered. We need a model of youth ministry that moves beyond traditional youth-only programming to include ministry with families, incorporation of young people into all aspects of church life, and partnerships with other churches/synagogues, schools, and community agencies in a common effort to promote

positive youth development. Youth ministry needs to situate itself within this broader context.

3. It must be flexible and inclusive. We need a model of youth ministry which responds creatively and flexibly to all the youth of the parish, not just the ones who attend programs. We need a model which is designed to enlarge the number of approaches and methods, used to minister with youth so that all youth can be reached through a parish's youth ministry.
4. It must put people first. We need a model of youth ministry that recognizes the changing needs and life situations of young people and their families and places this reality ahead of program structures. Programs are made for people; people are not made for programs. We need a flexible, adaptable model of youth ministry that can be tailored to address the real needs and life situation of today's young people and their families in our particular community setting.
5. It must be theologically sound. We need a model of youth ministry that is well-grounded in the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ and his Church. We need a model which will provide a clear understanding of youth ministry as integral to the life of the church.

2. A Comprehensive Vision and Model of Youth Ministry Grounded in the Mission of the Church

The mission of the Church is also the mission of youth ministry.

As one among many ministries of the Church, youth ministry must be understood in terms of the mission and ministry of the whole Church. ...the Church's mission is threefold: to proclaim the good news of salvation, offer itself as a group of people transformed by the Spirit into a community of faith, hope, and love; and to bring God's justice and love to others through service in its individual, social, and political dimensions. (Vision 3).

Far from peripheral to the church's concern, youth ministry is essential for helping the Church realize its mission with its young members. In this light, you could say that youth ministry means becoming Church with young people and their families, - focusing the ministries of the church upon this unique stage of life with its distinct life tasks and social context and then actively engaging young people as disciples in the mission of Jesus Christ and the Church. The Canadian "We Are Strong Together" youth ministry vision paper, "bases the foundation for youth ministry upon the aspect of relationship that exists within the Trinity. In this community of perfect love, persons know and are known, love and are loved, and together generate life."

This threefold mission of the church, rooted in the reign of God as proclaimed by Jesus, forms the basis for the goals and the framework or components of youth ministry: *Word* (Evangelization and Catechesis), *Prayer and Worship, Community Life, Justice and Service, Pastoral Care* (Guidance and Healing), *Leadership Development* (Enablement), and *Advocacy*. Using the following chart, the correlation between the components of youth ministry and the mission of the Church is unmistakable.

Mission of the Church	Component of Youth Ministry
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Proclamation of the Gospel in <i>word</i> and in <i>sacrament</i> , in an <i>organized</i> and <i>authorized</i> manner.	Evangelization Catechesis Prayer and Worship
Proclamation of the Gospel by the <i>quality</i> of the <i>Church's own life</i> .	Community Life Guidance/Pastoral Care
Proclamation of the Gospel by <i>application</i> of the Gospel to the struggle for <i>social justice, peace, and human rights</i> .	Justice and Service Advocacy

3. Goals of Comprehensive Youth Ministry

The three interdependent goals for ministry with youth focus our attention on different emphases for promoting an active discipleship in young people:

Goal 1: Youth Ministry works to foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person. This goal emphasizes *becoming*. Our understanding of the unique life tasks and social-cultural context of adolescents provides direction for fostering their growth in discipleship and Catholic identity. We promote growth by addressing the unique developmental and social needs of young and older adolescents, by promoting the internal assets of young people through personal guidance and specialized programming, and by strengthening the external structure that provides support and encouragement for this growth. We help youth develop a deeper and more personal relationship with Jesus Christ; experience a sense of personal well-being, security and peace; grow spiritually through study, reflection, prayer, and discussion with others; and develop a deeper understanding of the Scripture and Catholic Christian tradition and their applicability to life in today's complex society.

Goal 2: Youth Ministry seeks to draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission, and work of the faith community. This goal emphasizes *belonging*. Active engagement of youth in the Christian community's life and mission provides an important context for growth and overcomes the danger of marginalizing youth in the Church, segregating them from centers of power, responsibility and commitment in community life. Community provides a context for the healthy development of Catholic Christian values and identity, a community of engagement for youth, and opportunities to develop positive relationships between adolescents and adult Catholic Christian role models. This goal challenges us to provide the meaningful participation youth require, to support family life, and to integrate young people into the life of the faith community.

Goal 3: Youth Ministry empowers young people to become disciples of Jesus Christ who witness to their faith by living and working for justice, peace, and human dignity. This goal emphasizes *transforming* and *servicing*. Helping young people realize that their faith in Jesus Christ calls them to serve others and work toward a world that is built on the values of the Reign of God is an essential task for youth ministry.

We do this by helping young people integrate faith and life, develop life-affirming Gospel values, develop skills for serving others and advocating for social change, and become personally involved in action. We are called to take on an activist or experiential focus so that young people can learn how to be a disciple by being a disciple. We need to provide concrete ways by

which the demands of discipleship can be personally experienced. A youth ministry that promotes discipleship will be a ministry in which adolescents' resources are tried and tested, in which their present capacities and skills are stretched to the limits, and in which the excitement and daring of being a Christian is experienced personally. Young people need to have a true opportunity for testing out and exploring what discipleship in the church and world might ultimately involve.

Our challenge is to help youth use their considerable energy and efforts in positive ways. There is nothing that can compare with the increase in sensitivity to others, sense of personal value, and compassion that adolescents develop when adults provide concrete structures to channel their energy. Combined with this involvement is reflection which brings them to new insights and a more positive view of themselves, their world, and their future.

4. Programming within Comprehensive Youth Ministry

The Comprehensive Model is best implemented using a variety of program offerings organized in time formats and settings designed to meet the needs and interests of youth and families. This comprehensive style of programming is characterized by the following elements of effective ministry with youth.

Balanced Ministry Programming: Demonstrates a balance among the components, program settings, and methods so that the needs of all the young people and their families can be reached, and all the resources of the community wisely used. Given this broad scope, it is very tempting to emphasize only one or two components or to sponsor only gathered youth programs.

Interest-centered: Develops programming based on the needs of youth and families. Programs are designed around the different interests of youth and families so that they attract a wide spectrum of participation. This avoids the problem of attempting to create every program “with everybody” in mind.

Variety: Realizes that no one format or timeframe works for everyone so it thrives on a variety of program formats, gathered and non-gathered; a variety of program schedules – weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, extended time, full day, overnight, weekend, weeklong, 3-6 p.m. weekdays; a variety of environments for programming – parish facility, homes, retreat centers, community centers; and a variety of leaders in different program setting. There is so much diversity in needs and so much competition for young people's time that a youth ministry must be very creative in offering formats, settings and schedules that respond to the real life situation of young people.

Freedom of Choice in Participation: Overcomes the “you have to come to everything” mentality by allowing young people the opportunity to select the programs that best address their needs in a time schedule and format that best suits their interests and life situation.

The comprehensive model is similar to a university which offers a variety of courses on different topics, at different times, and often at different locations to meet the needs of its students. By providing well written and interesting program descriptions and by providing guidance to young people as they select programs, this model gives young people the variety to find a topic

or program that meets their needs and is offered when they can attend. The key in this model is offering enough variety to both respond to the adolescents' needs and to attract them to participate.

There are many advantages of the comprehensive mode's approach to programming:

- It clarifies the purpose of each program since each program meets different needs. Youth ministries which embrace the comprehensive model offer a variety of program content, but each program has a specific purpose.
- Interest-centered programming builds attendance patterns with multiple involvement of youth. Youth ministries which embrace the comprehensive model find that participation increases because of responding to needs, offering variety, and giving people the freedom to participate in the time and format which best suits them. Simply put, it fits the family and young people's schedule better.
- Recruiting leaders could be easier since you are asking for shorter-term commitment with more clearly defined responsibilities. The paradox in the comprehensive model is that you will need more volunteer leaders, but it will be easier to find them because you are clearer about their job and their time commitment. Like everyone else, leaders have busy lives. Experience has proven that a youth ministry which offers a variety of program content and program schedules will have an easier time finding leaders than a youth ministry which offers only weekly or year-long leadership roles.
- Specializing develops the talents and gifts of youth and adults more effectively, and there are more opportunities for expanded youth leadership. Effective youth ministries match the gifts and abilities of an adult or youth leader to a particular program, develop his or her competence and confidence in conducting the program, and then offer the program multiple times (in a year or over several years) for different groups of young people and/or families. This maximizes the investment of the leader and reduces leader turnover. The variety of programming offered in the comprehensive model offers more leadership roles for youth, more opportunities to plan and conduct programs, and more settings to minister to their peers.
- Youth get more involved with adult role models since the group size in each program tends to be smaller. In the large, gathered youth groups, young people may have only had contact with one or two adult role models for the entire year. In the comprehensive model, they have the chance to interact with a variety of adult role models in a variety of program settings. Even though the programs may be short term in duration, the adult-youth ratio is better, allowing for the development of more meaningful relationships which can continue after the program has concluded.
- Programs can be allowed to die without endangering the rest of your offerings. By regularly evaluating programs, you can determine which ones are ineffective or have addressed a need which no longer exists and can therefore be dropped or redesigned. With the variety of program offerings, no one program carries the responsibility for the entire ministry. This allows for a high degree of flexibility in addressing new needs.

The comprehensive model, with its eight components, create a natural management system. Each of the eight components could be coordinated by a task force or committee of youth and adult leaders who would be responsible for developing and conducting programming;. A youth ministry team or council representing each component could coordinate the work of the various task forces or committees, set policies and direction, and evaluate programming. In smaller

churches, the eight committees could easily be substituted for one youth ministry team which coordinates the youth ministry, as well as plans and/or conducts programs.

5. Components of a Comprehensive Youth Ministry

To be effective, ministry with youth seeks to achieve a balance among the many components of a comprehensive ministry. Each of these components revolves around the community's own life. Seen from this angle, youth ministry operates out of the community's life. The components of a comprehensive youth ministry give shape and direction to the Church's mission. Very briefly, these components are:

Advocacy: *interpreting* the needs of youth and their families, especially the social problems facing them and *acting* with or on behalf of youth and their families for a change in the systems (policies, procedures, programs) which create or contribute to the social problems; *inviting* them to address the social problems that they face.

Catechesis: *sponsoring* youth toward maturity in Catholic Christian faith as a living reality through the kind of teaching and learning that emphasizes understanding, reflection, and transformation; *fostering* in youth a communal identity as Catholic Christians within the intergenerational community of faith and helping them to develop their own personal faith identity (*the Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis*).

Community Life: *creating* an environment which nurtures meaningful relationships among youth and between youth and adults characterized by gospel values (e.g. acceptance of all people, trust, respect, cooperation, honesty, taking responsibility, willingness to serve); *helping* young people feel like a valued part of the church community; *providing* opportunities for social interaction and meaningful participation in the life of the church and civic community.

Evangelization: *proclaiming* through word and witness the good News of the Gospel to youth who have not yet heard or seen it and *inviting* them into a relationship with Jesus Christ and the community of believers; *ongoing witness* of the faith community as it attempts to live out the Gospel with such authenticity that the faith of all the members is sustained and nourished. Evangelization is the energizing core of all the components of youth ministry (*the Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization*).

Justice and Service: *guiding* young people in the development of a social consciousness and a commitment to a life of justice and service grounded in their faith in Jesus Christ, in the scriptures and in Catholic social teaching; *empowering* young people (and their families) to work for justice by concrete efforts to address the causes of human suffering, to serve those in need, to pursue peace, and to defend the life, dignity, and rights of all people; *infusing* the concepts of justice and peace into all youth ministry efforts.

Leadership Development/Enablement: *recruiting, training,* and *supporting* youth and adult leaders in youth ministry; *empowering* youth for leadership and ministry with their peers, in

their schools, and in their church and civic community; *developing* a leadership team of youth and adults to organize and coordinate a ministry with youth; *partnering* with parents and families in promoting positive youth development and faith growth.

Pastoral Care: *promoting* positive youth and family development through a variety of preventive strategies (e.g., developing life skills and parenting skills); *caring* for youth and families in crisis through support, counselling, and referral to appropriate community agencies; and *providing* guidance as youth face life decisions and make moral choices.

Prayer and Worship: *assisting* young people in deepening their relationship with Jesus through spiritual development and a personal prayer life; *providing* a variety of communal prayer and worship experiences with youth to deepen and celebrate their relationship with Jesus in a caring Christian community; *involving* young people in the sacramental life of the Church.

6. Ministry Settings for Comprehensive Youth Ministry

The Comprehensive Model of Youth Ministry presents a new system for conceptualizing and organizing a youth ministry. This approach flows from the model of adolescent development presented in Section 1 and from the mission and ministry of the Church. It links the eight components of youth ministry (presented above) with four different program settings: Youth programming, family ministry, involvement in church life, and collaboration with the civic community. In some areas there is a fifth setting: Catholic Schools. The components of youth ministry can be programmed in each of these different ways, thereby multiplying the options for ministry with youth and families. This model provides a means to reach a broader audience and use the resources of the parish and civic community more effectively.

Youth programming involves organizing a variety of activities around the specific developmental and social needs of young people. It involves youth and adult leaders in program planning and implementation. In the comprehensive model there will still be a need for programs directly targeted to youth and their unique needs.

Family ministry involves programs and activities geared to incorporating a family perspective in all youth ministry programming; in developing specific programs and activities for parents, for youth and parents, and for the whole family; and for supporting and strengthening in-home family life. In the comprehensive model serious attention is given to ministry with families as a crucial context for promoting positive youth development. In addition to creating new family programs or resources, some of the current youth-only programs can be redesigned with a family perspective or with family involvement.

Involvement in Church life offers young people opportunities to develop a sense of belonging and loyalty to the community; to feel like valued members of the community, and to take responsibility as leaders in parish-wide programs, such as liturgical ministries, service ministries, educational ministries, and community/social events. In the comprehensive model meaningful involvement in church life and the development of intergenerational relationships are seen as rich resources for young people to learn the story of faith experientially. Leaders in

ministry will need to advocate for youth participation and become the catalysts for creating new opportunities for youth involvement in the community. This may mean reducing youth-focused programming to allocate time and energy to community-based programming.

Collaboration with the civic community provides a way for youth ministry to utilize community-wide resources and activities, and to plan joint activities, programs, and meetings with the different youth-serving organizations in the community (churches, schools, scouting programs, youth agencies). In the comprehensive model churches need to work with other community organizations in a common effort to promote positive youth development. Sharing resources, co-sponsoring programming, mobilizing the community to address youth issues are only some of the ways churches and community organizations can work together for the common good of all young people.

Collaboration with Catholic Schools provides a way for youth ministry to utilize the resources and activities of the local Catholic School to support ones parish ministry. Collaboration with schools provides us with the opportunity to reach out to youth who are not attending church. This opportunity to plan and share activities provides us with a richer and broader Catholic ministry offering. In the comprehensive model, churches need to work with their local Catholic schools in a common effort to promote faith development. Sharing resources is a welcomed opportunity to reflect continuity in the development of young person's faith.

Each of these program settings can be organized as gathered programs or non-gathered programs (small group or individual), thereby multiplying your programming options.

Gathered programs focus on participation in organized, assembled programs for youth, families, parish community, or civic community (e.g., parish events, intergenerational programs, youth meetings, social events, trips, retreats).

Non-Gathered programs include programs that provide maximum flexibility in addressing specific needs of youth and/or families using a variety of small group and individualized approaches (e.g. home-based activities and resources, community service, spiritual direction, mentoring, independent learning, small group Bible study).