

Starting from Scratch

Parishes often struggle to organize and launch youth ministry efforts. Three things are needed: training, facilitation and consultation.

Training provides the necessary knowledge and skills. Facilitation moves a group of people through a planning process. Consultation involves advice and problem solving as parish leaders apply the training to their particular situation. The combination of training, facilitation and consultation that makes up **Starting from Scratch** can effectively provide what a faith community needs to implement effective youth ministry in their community. Note: **Starting from Scratch** is designed for parishes with little or no (recent) history of comprehensive youth ministry.

What's involved in Starting from Scratch?

1. Initial Assessment: An initial assessment with a member of the Office for Catholic Youth Ministry can determine whether this program is suitable for your parish. Pastor, parish staff and pastoral council should be involved in the assessment process. A key criterion for determining readiness includes:
 - a. General readiness in the parish faith community for developing comprehensive youth ministry
 - b. A sufficient number of adults and youth willing to commit themselves to the steps of the process and to follow through afterwards
 - c. A designated leader on the parish staff (Primary Youth Ministry Contact, catechetical leader, pastoral minister, etc.)
 - d. A leader (at least in potential) to guide the ministry after the conclusion of the process
 - e. A budget equal to the task of any and all photocopying, postage, office supplies, food and beverages anticipated throughout the process – as well as adequate financial support for the team(s) and plans generated by the planning process
 - f. The willing support of pastor/parish council and parish staff.

If the program seems right for your parish, the formal assent of the pastor is necessary to ensure parish backing and support. If, on the other hand, the program seems inappropriate or untimely for the parish, the Office for Catholic Youth Ministry staff will assist in identifying steps necessary to address obstacles. It is much better to postpone the planning and address obstacles — or completely discontinue the process — than to raise expectations only to have those expectations dashed.

2. **Appoint a Leader of the Planning/Design Process:** A designated leader is appointed, usually a Coordinator of Youth Minister, Director of Religious Education or a Pastoral Minister. This person must be a parish staff person, so as to avail the process of the necessary information and resources. (Note: this does not necessarily suggest that this staff person will be responsible for overseeing the developing ministry, although that is recommended.)
3. **Gather a Planning/Design Group:** The designated leader gathers a planning/design group and the first sessions of the process are scheduled. The planning team should ideally include youth and adults in sufficient numbers and diversity to adequately represent the parish faith community (usually 10-15 persons).
4. **Form & Train Parish Leadership:** Both the Design Group and other parish leaders (staff, pastoral council) will need to be oriented to the bishops' vision of comprehensive youth ministry as described in their document *Renewing the Vision - A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* (NCCB, 1997). This best takes place in one meeting where all the key leaders are present and can interact with one another.
5. **The Design Phase:** The initial design phase typically requires a minimum of four or five meetings of 2 hours in length, as well as activities between meetings (e.g. need assessment, editing the mission statement, clarifying goals and objectives, consulting with the pastor, etc.). Meetings typically include prayer, training and group work.
6. **Build Team(s) & Launch the Ministry:** Once the design phase is concluded, the parish is ready to develop a team (or teams, depending upon how ambitious the planning is — and how available the people resources are). Some of the original design group will likely stay on and become team members; however, more recruiting of youth and adults is usually necessary.

Once the recruiting stage is complete, an Office for Catholic Youth Ministry staff member can facilitate a team-building and planning retreat that will effectively launch the ministry. Thereafter, Catholic Youth Ministry serves as a consultant to the implementation of the mission, goals and plans as they unfold, intervening when called upon by the leadership and available by phone and email throughout.

Perhaps the most critical part of this stage is to authorize and empower the person who will serve as the ministry leader. Whether volunteer or paid, this person should have the capabilities (at least in potential), and the time, energy and commitment to lead the ministry. A competency assessment of this leader will assist in determining his/her readiness to lead the ministry. This person will likely need to pursue additional training.

7. Ongoing Training: Additional training will likely be necessary for both adults and youth. Catholic Youth Ministry will provide training modules to the team as needed.
8. Regular Ongoing Consultation: The ministry leader and CYM staff determine a mutually- agreed upon schedule of ongoing consultation, consisting of meetings in person or by phone, at least monthly.
9. Evaluation: At the conclusion of a mutually agreed-upon time period (e.g. six months or a year), Catholic Youth Ministry will assist in evaluating the planning process and the ministry flowing from it.

How Long Will It Take?

The initial design steps are fluid and may be accomplished within a 6-8 week period, if parish participants are willing and able to devote the time. Usually more time is necessary. The team- building, training and implementation steps normally take six months to a year. The covenant with the Catholic Youth Ministry typically concludes between six months to a year from the first gathering, at the conclusion of the evaluation process.

What's the Cost?

This service is offered at no charge to diocesan parishes. The process will likely require the expenses of photocopying, mailings, providing food and beverages at some meetings, etc. Additionally, the planning process will lead to the implementation of youth ministry activities and events that will require some level of funding. A participating parish needs to acknowledge that it will need to financially support the youth ministry team(s) and the plans that will result from the process.

What's Next?

Obviously, this process demands a considerable outlay of resources, by the parish and Catholic Youth Ministry. Due to the extensive and intensive nature of this service to parishes, and to its limited personnel resources, Catholic Youth Ministry is limited in terms of the number of parishes that it can work with in this way. Therefore you are encouraged to contact CYM right away if you are interested. You may be placed on a waiting list.