

Re-Establishing the Archdiocesan Vision for Ministry with Youth: A Timeline

I. Fall 2024-Summer 2025: Initial Stirrings & the Genesis of AYMP Lab

• As the rollout of Family Faith Formation and Confirmation consultation continued, **it became apparent that youth ministry needs attention:**

- Practitioners in the field of youth ministry shared that old models are no longer bearing the expected fruit with the current and rising generations of young people.
- Catechetical & youth ministry leaders expressed a loss of the distinctiveness of their particular disciplines.
- Nationally, research shows that a majority of effective & enduring professional lay ministers historically emerged through youth ministry roles, but also that this vital “pipeline” is threatened by disinvestment.
- We could also foresee that urgent local circumstances with impact for youth demanded a response:
 - The Seek the City process would require a multi-year rebuilding of communal norms in many parishes, and without advocacy, young people may be unintentionally left out of that process.
 - *(At that time possible, but now actual)* impending changes in Confirmation norms necessitate greater clarity and urgency around expectations for parishes regarding ministry with young people.

• After prayerful consideration, **OFYYAM applied for and received a small grant from the Mark D. Pacione Foundation to jump-start conversations, beginning with young people themselves.**

• Announcement of the grant-funded **Archdiocesan Youth Missionary Protagonism Lab (AYMP Lab)** made a small splash nationally, but recruitment to the multifaceted process proved challenging *(due to the grant’s timeline, our application process opened in the months immediately following the announcement of Confirmation-at-age-9 and in the midst of the implementation phase of the Seek the City process).*

II. Fall 2025-Winter 2026 – Listening Phase

• August 2025 – April 2026 – **AYMP Lab Process:** Ultimately youth from 4 parishes participated: Our Lady of the Mountains (Cumberland), St. Mark (Fallston), St. Ursula (Parkville), and St. Katharine Drexel (Frederick). *Their insights and those of their adult accompaniers are included in Appendix B.*

• September 2025 – **Region IV Listen, Teach, Send Workshop** (Saint John Paul II Shrine, DC) – Archdiocese of Baltimore leaders were well represented at this initial unpacking of the National Pastoral Framework *(see Appendix A)* approved in 2024. Hopeful and honest conversations took place among the USCCB, diocesan, and parish staff and volunteers present. However, there was a sense that deeper practical application is needed.

• October 2025 - **Dreaming the Future of Youth Ministry** (McGrath Institute for Church Life, IN) – Rena & four parish leaders attended this 4-day collaborative gathering of Catholic, evangelical, and mainline protestant leaders. *The conclusions of this group are included in Appendix C.*

• November 2025 – **NCYC Papal Dialogue** (Indianapolis, IN & online/broadcast) - 80+ from the AOB attended the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis. There, a young lady from our delegation, Mia Smothers, became the first teen in history to ask the Holy Father a question via live video call. The dialogue took place in front of 16,000 in the stadium, with 275+ watch parties across the U.S. and over a quarter of a million people (in 120+ countries) watching live. Coverage by national, international, diocesan, & secular media was widespread (40+ stories). *The questions posed by the 5 teens representing all the teens who were consulted are included in Appendix D.*

• December 2025 – **OFYYAM’s Monthly Parish Formation Ministers’ Check In** (online) on Zoom focused on “opening the conversation around youth ministry” with local leaders. *A summary of the themes that emerged from these and recent one-on-one conversations on the topic are included in Appendix E.*

III. Spring 2026-Fall 2026 — Articulation & Drafting Phase

- March 2026 – Present: **Exploring the NFCYM's The Drexel Project** – We are currently discerning parishes to invite to participate in Round 1 of this grant-funded project focused on service. The Drexel Project's resources utilize a Design Process (*Discern, Serve, Reflect*) and pillars (*Accompaniment, Youth Protagonism, Shared Leadership, and Theological Reflection*) that resonate with many of the priorities our office has identified for ministry in general. Since NFCYM secured a large grant from the Lilly Endowment, there is potential for parish microgrants of up to \$10,000 per parish for those who apply directly to NFCYM. There is also the opportunity for OFYYAM to make an application in the future for up to \$125,00 for diocese-wide initiatives on youth and service.
- April 2026 – **APYM Gathering on the Future of Youth Ministry** – The Association of Professional Youth Ministers (APYM) is graciously welcoming us to begin the consultation on the structure and content of a subsequent document(s) and/or implementation tool(s) describing and responding to the current landscape.
- May 2026 – **Annual Bosco Day (rescheduled due to snow)**. Providentially, this unusual timing allows us to draw the entire community of parish formation ministry leaders into a more robust conversation around the four dimensions across the age groups, informing the summer drafting process.
- June-August 2026 – **Drafting Process Begins (using the Four Dimensions as framework)** – Engaging targeted small groups of leaders and individuals with particular gifts to work on drafting a useful document to accompany existing universal, USCCB, and AOB documents on faith formation & youth ministry in the Archdiocese. The four dimensions of Community Building, Prayer & Liturgy, Formal/Intentional Catechesis, and Meaningful Service (*see handout*) are the primary organizing principles of the resources to be developed.
- October 28, 2026 – **Presentation on Engaging Parents into Youth Ministry** – Robert Feduccia will present his research on parents and youth ministry along, with practical application. This presentation is funded by the ecumenical Tenx10 Initiative, which is striving to help 10 million young people to encounter Christ over 10 years.

IV. Winter 2027 – Implementation Phase begins

- January 2027 – Mark the 85th anniversary of youth ministry in the Archdiocese of Baltimore at Bosco Day
- Ongoing – **Accompaniment of Parish Leaders/Pastors in Implementing the Refreshed Vision & Advocating for Youth Ministry** as a key mode of investment in both the Church of the future and the Church of today.

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IX. Appendix A: Listen, Teach, Send USCCB Pastoral Framework Summary



Figure 1: Listen, Teach, Send Infographic

V. Appendix B: AYMP Lab Insights Entering the “Homestretch” (the Evaluate & Celebrate phase)

At the August in-person retreat, we focused on the initial moment of the iterative design cycle, “**Pray & Listen**,” and began the transition to the “**Explore & Imagine**” step, while offering ample time for community building and prayer among those present. On the heels of this gathering, teams were charged during the fall “**Discern & Plan**” step to identify a challenge in their local parish community that they might creatively address with the assistance of their local adult mentors. Teams then developed and submitted applications for microgrants to fund a youth-led project in their parish. All four teams successfully demonstrated their vision and provided a reasonable budget and implementation plan, successfully securing funds for all four projects. They have moved through the “**Execute and Document**” phase and are concluding the “**Evaluate & Celebrate**” phase.

Challenges AYMP Lab teams identified and chose to address:

- Our Lady of the Mountains: Geography is a challenge – it is hard to get teens together. Opportunities to gather for community and for worship (Adoration especially) are limited.
- St. Ursula: People in our community are in need and the church should be involved in responding to that need.
- St. Mark: Scripture knowledge is lacking, and we want to take active steps in evangelization by sharing the faith.
- St. Katharine Drexel: Our community is growing rapidly, which is wonderful, but that means there is often not enough space to gather at the parish at times when it would make sense for young people to do so.

Projects OFYYAM funded as first-iteration responses, led by teens, addressing these challenges:

- Our Lady of the Mountains: Forming a youth ministry with regular gatherings and subsidies as an incentive for teens who participate, to attend Catholic Youth Summer Camp. Formal referee contracts and background checks.
- St. Ursula: Hosting a Tinsel & Turkey holiday gathering for those in need in the community (including bringing items to a family who were unable to attend the event).
- St. Mark: A multi-faceted series of events involving young people in crafting rosaries and then sharing rosaries, bibles, and personal witness with peers and with senior adults.
- St. Katharine Drexel: Creating a functional and inviting outdoor meeting space that can be used for various types of gatherings, with a particular priority given to young people of the parish.

As they entered the final months of the AYMP Lab process, we posed some questions to help shape our approach to youth ministry. Here are some answers to those questions:

What would YOU ask Pope Leo (or any other church leaders)?

- How do you live among a community or world that doesn’t really accept faith and rejects the moral standards the church states? How do you combat that?
- How do you know when you have an overwhelming sense of God telling you something? How do you discern if it’s God or just something in your own head?
- How he remains focused on God through spiritual desolation
- What can I do to incorporate God more in my life?
- Is there any sin that God would not forgive?

What do you wish adults understood about teens?

- We are extremely busy. If we are communicating with you, we may not have time to wait for an answer because we have allocated a certain amount of time for a task and then need to move on to our homework, jobs, etc.
- If we have an hour for something, we have an hour, not three hours. We have school, work, sports. We’re not just sitting around all the time.
- That we are capable of leading and making decisions.

- We can make our own friends. Sometimes I think youth ministry is like adults trying to be our friends, but what we actually need is a life's witness. Teenagers aren't really craving connection with adults but we are craving connection with other teenagers who can relate.
- Sometimes it feels like we are given a vote in leadership but then our vote is "set on fire and thrown in the trash."

What about do you love about being a teen in the Church? What frustrates you?

- I love that I have so many more years ahead to grow in my faith, and I get to be a public witness to my peers. Something that frustrates me is that a lot of people think they know what every teen needs or is seeking even though they are so separated from what it is actually like to be a teen.
- I love meeting other Christian teens who are passionate about their faith. It can be frustrating sometimes to see what people say about Catholics especially when what they are saying is incorrect.
- I love having that community of people you can turn to. What has frustrated me is just the disrespect and disregard for our need for change and our wants.
- I love being a teen in Church. I like to volunteer and make a difference to others.
- I love my faith and being able to communicate about it with others my age.

What are your hopes for the Young Church in the Archdiocese of Baltimore in the coming years?

- That not only that we can take more of a leadership role in our church but by getting those responsibilities that we don't lose our faith in the process.
- I hope young people in the Church become more involved in the Church community. We see more activities developed and run by young members.
- That they can flourish and grow together as a community.
- To be examples as universal leaders.
- I hope we can grow in community.

At the closing session of AYMP Lab, we gave the teens space for a non-facilitated discussion about what why they participated in the Lab and what/how they hope adults in the Church will advocate for locally. Here are a few representative quotes from their discussion:

In [our parish], we would like to see more involvement with youth, because we do have a lot of people come to church, but not a lot of people around our age group. But I think that also comes with **parents and other people advocating for their children to go to church.**

I think a way adults could help advocate for that is like parents and specifically, they could try to tailor their child's faith to their interests. Like in our area, we have this, if you join FCA, there's a faith soccer camp that you can go through every summer. **If this kid likes soccer, then why don't they get encouraged to go to a faith-based soccer camp?** I think that's one way to get the youth more involved within the church itself.

It sounds really selfish, but I kind of wanted to take a more of an actual leadership role in our church, because I'm about to go to college. I'm about to go super far away. So I kind of wanted to build my faith to a point where...college is hard for everyone's faith.

The more you're at the physical church, for whatever reason, if it's youth events, if it's just a dinner, it does help you grow in your faith, even if it's not with certain people or people talking about your faith. **Just being there helps you grow closer in your faith,** which is kind of why I ended up doing what I ended up doing [AYMP Lab].

And another thing with our youth group is that we don't really have any leaders kind of...Like adult leaders, maybe one or two. So maybe even that, **people who want to step up and help within our growing of the youth group would be very beneficial.**

[In our parish], we do have adult leaders, but we also have a core set of peer ministers that, excuse me, that help, and kind of run the show, because I think **what's really important is that they see their peers leading them, their peers living an active faith and then wanting to do that. ...we want regular things to become holy. Like, a soccer game can be rooted in faith. Your math class can be rooted in faith. Your family dinners can be rooted in faith.**

I just came from a meeting with, I'm a leader in campus ministry at my school, and I came from a meeting, and we were talking about how our school needs to make it more of a culture of faith. And I think that's something that can draw people towards those youth ministries, those youth groups. **If we create a culture of faith where it's not niche to live out your faith, it's more culturally accepted, but also culturally desired.**

And I think what we need to focus on the good aspects and stop focusing on, "Oh, people are turning away from the faith." That's not happening. There's 30,000 Catholics coming to the church. That's a 38% increase from last year. That's insane. That's what needs to be focused on, and we want to figure out a way to draw those people in, because that's a big number, and I can guarantee a lot of them are teens, a lot of them are college students. **What's happening, and how are we drawing them back in?**

Something that I've also noticed throughout my church, **I know it's controversial, the whole Confirmation becoming when you're younger. I absolutely hate this.** ...And people say, "We're going to try to focus on making youth group more enjoyable." **But I also think no matter how enjoyable you make youth group, if someone doesn't have a reason to be there or something making them go, it's going to be hard.**

I've seen so many people come to our Confirmation retreat, and after Confirmation retreat, they become friends with all of these Catholics and all of these people who are also going to their church. And then from there, they begin going to youth group, and they begin going to mass every single Sunday. **It's like you need a reason to go at first, and then once you're there, then we have a reason to keep going. But we have to have something making them go. And I think pulling the [Confirmation] age down so much is going to do the opposite.**

I agree. I think it's almost like, for me at least, this came as a surprise. **I was confirmed when I was a freshman, and then it was like, oh, all of a sudden we're making this change.** And I've talked to a bunch of people throughout my work in ministry, and a lot of them say **the Confirmation retreat and those things are what made them want to be confirmed. Those youth group interactions are what made them want to be confirmed.** They didn't necessarily know what confirmation was or want to get involved, take an active role in their faith until they went through those things. And I think just taking them away with not really... I don't know anybody who was asked about this, and **I don't know the background of how they made the decision, but it just happened.** When if you see the impact of these things that were taking place, the impact of the confirmation retreat, the impact of these youth groups and where was this decision made, but **there wasn't, to my knowledge, a lot of reasoning or it wasn't given to us. We don't know why that happened, and maybe there is an explanation somewhere, but I think that would be good.**

...But having to go to confirmation stuff, I think really does, it changes some people's lives. **I've heard so many people say, like, "This camp, this thing changed my life." One example is work camp. One of the local churches makes their confirmation students go to a work camp, which is a whole other problem, but a lot of those kids end up falling in love with it because of the culture that we have around church camp.** But making them go is a whole different-

Yeah, I agree. **What would you guys think if we pushed to, I don't know who we would talk to, maybe if it's the archbishop.** I've talked to the archbishop. I've met him before. But if we tried to, as these representatives of the youth of Maryland, the archdiocese, **what if we tried to get, this might be hard, but tried to get some sort of meeting or to talk to him about these issues, and bring these concerns to the archbishop himself or somebody high up in the archdiocese,** and talk about seeking the reasoning. Because if we're representatives, at least I know I get questions all the time about this stuff, and it's like, I don't know. I wasn't given the reason for it. What if we had that opportunity? Would you guys take up that opportunity? [General agreement]...

They [the AYMP Lab team] have done so much great work with giving us these opportunities... **I think the archbishop being able to hear what they've been able to do through this program will help themselves be able to keep doing this for years and years and years, as long as they can, and maybe get more support, more funding, whatever they need. I think us talking directly to someone higher up, telling them how much we appreciate it, would help them in a lot of ways, too.**

VI. Appendix C: McGrath Institute Ecumenical Gathering Conclusions

Shifts in Youth Ministry: *Key Insights from Dreaming Youth Ministry's Future*

During our collaborative sessions, participants identified several key shifts necessary for the future of youth ministry. These reflect a move away from narrow or outdated practices toward a vision that is holistic, empowering, and aligned with lifelong discipleship in Christ.

- **FROM “TELLING” TO OFFERING “PLACES OF PRACTICE”**
 - Ministry must go beyond conveying information. We need to create spaces where young people can practice faith through prayer, service, and community engagement.
- **FROM ENTERTAINING TO EMPOWERING; THEN FROM EMPOWERING TO SHARING POWER.**
 - The goal is not to entertain but to form and equip young people—and ultimately to entrust them with leadership and decision-making in the Church.
- **FROM AGE-BASED SEGMENTATION TO A FAMILY/INTERGENERATIONAL FORMATION MODEL.**
 - Rather than siloed programs, we need intergenerational approaches that engage families and the wider community in faith formation.
- **FROM ASSIGNMENT OF THE FEW TO RESPONSIBILITY OF WHOLE.**
 - Youth ministry should not be the burden of a small group. It is the responsibility of the entire parish community to accompany the next generation.
- **FROM DESTINATIONS TO MILESTONES.**
 - Sacraments and events are not the finish line. Instead, we should focus on milestones that mark and celebrate ongoing growth in faith.
- **FROM PROGRAMMING TO LIFE-LONG CONVERSION OF MIND, BODY AND SPIRIT IN CHRIST.**
 - The true measure of ministry is not activities but a lifelong journey of discipleship that forms the whole person in Christ.
- **FROM POLISHED TO AUTHENTIC.**
 - Young people are drawn not to perfection but to authenticity—leaders and communities that live faith with honesty and integrity.

VII. Appendix D: Questions Posed to the Holy Father during the NCYC Papal Dialogue

- Transcript courtesy of *The National Catholic Register*. ***Emphasis and highlighting has been added*** to underscore what is on the minds and hearts of young people nationally.
- The unabridged transcript, which includes the Holy Father's answers, is available at: <https://www.ncregister.com/news/pope-leo-speaks-to-youth-ewtn-digital-encounter>
- The video recording is available via EWTN's YouTube channels: @EWTN and @EWTNNews (Video is titled "Full Pope Leo XIV's LIVE Digital Encounter with U.S. Youth | NCYC | November 21, 2025")

Katie Prejean McGrady (emcee): Well, good morning, Holy Father. ... There are 16,000 young people with burning questions and a lot of hope for this moment. Selfishly, I'd love to know your opening word for Wordle, but we'll talk about it later.

The questions they have range across the spectrum. We want to know about prayer, and we want to talk about technology. And you mentioned a moment ago how this conference changed my life as a teenager and is changing their lives right now. This conference provides opportunities for prayer and for confession, to go to Mass, to be at Mass with so many bishops.

So we have a starting question. Mia, how about you ask the Holy Father a question about the sacraments.

Mia Smothers: Thank you, Katie. Good morning, Holy Father. My name is Mia Smothers from the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Maryland. In my experience, it's been difficult to voice my mistakes. Is it **hard for you to accept God's mercy when you make mistakes or feel like you've let people down?**

...Katie Prejean McGrady: **Mental health** is certainly something that we heard [about] from a lot of young people as we prepared for this conversation. And whether a young person is dealing with a diagnosis personally or has somebody that they love that is struggling with depression or anxiety or ADHD, it's a weight. It's a weight to communicate it. It's a weight to ask for help. I see you nodding, so I know we're excited to continue the conversation. Ezequiel, we were chatting about this. Why don't you ask the Holy Father?

Ezequiel: Good morning, Holy Father. My name is Ezequiel Ponce, and I live in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, California. Growing up in public school, I got to see my peers and even myself struggle with our faith.

My question is, there are moments in which **a lot of us feel sad or overwhelmed**. And even if we pray or try to have faith, friends and family often say, "Just give my problems to the Lord." But **how can I really give my problems to God and feel that he is close to me even if I feel like this?**

...Katie Prejean McGrady: You know, Ezequiel, we were chatting earlier, and you said you wanted to talk a little more about that communication, right? Listening to the Lord, but also communicating with each other, listening with each other, listening from experts. So, why don't you keep it going?

Ezequiel: Thanks, Katie. And I just want to acknowledge something that you said about building a relationship with the Lord, and by doing that, by morning prayer or even praying the Rosary. So my next question to you is: **It's easy at times to feel lost, but I'm afraid to talk about it because I don't think others will really understand how I feel. What can we, the youth, adopt to communicate better with others and help them understand us?**

...Katie Prejean McGrady: Thank you. Holy Father, I'm not going to totally throw out the script, but I want to ask you a question. You mentioned prayer, and I think a lot of young people get distracted with prayer sometimes. Their minds wander, the phones buzzing in their pocket. Can I just ask, like real quick? We don't have to tell anybody outside of here. **When you get distracted, what do you do to bring yourself back in?**

Pope Leo: It depends on the distraction, actually. But sometimes the best thing to do is to follow the distraction for a moment, see why it's there, but then to turn back and to remember why you're there and why you're in prayer.

...Ezequiel: Amen. I'm glad I asked.

Katie Prejean McGrady: That's good for me. I know it's certainly good for them. These phones are often that distraction. And while I've got mine buzzing in my pocket to keep us on time, there are moments where you just kind of scroll endlessly or [focus too much on] that technology, which can be quite useful. The Vatican this year hosted the Jubilee of Digital Missionaries and Influencers, and it was a profound moment to talk about sharing the Gospel. But we've all been talking about the glowing screen that pulls us away from what's right in front of us. So, Chris, why don't you ask a question about tech to the Holy Father? He was on Twitter once.

Chris: Holy Father, good morning. My name is Chris Pantelakis, and I am from the Archdiocese of Las Vegas, Nevada. I often find myself sitting on my phone endlessly scrolling.

I've also noticed that everybody around me is the same or has a very similar problem. Many adults have told me that technology is great with moderation. So my question for you is: **How do you suggest we balance all these great tools — social media, smartphones, tablets and any other devices — while also making faith connections outside of technology?**

...**Katie Prejean McGrady:** Thank you. When we were talking about this in preparation, we also learned some fun facts about the teenagers of today, that AI, artificial intelligence, ChatGPT is kind of in their lives.

And Micah, you shared very vulnerably with all of us about how you're struggling with some of that. So why don't you ask a question?

Micah: Good morning, Holy Father. My name is Micah Alcisto, and I'm from the Diocese of Honolulu in Hawaii. Often times, many of us, including myself, can rely on using AI or ChatGPT to assist in finding solutions in things, such as our schoolwork, like writing a good essay or walking us through a math problem or answering a history question — and really **using AI as a tool or a resource to find solutions and an answer to a problem that we may have in our mind. So, Holy Father, what do you think we should be cautious of when embracing this new technology?**

...**Katie Prejean McGrady:** ...Elise, you're our last young person, so make it count.

Elise: Hello, Holy Father. My name is Elise Wing, and I'm from the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa. Holy Father, I am so excited about the future, but I'm also worried. **I'm worried that the Church might not be relevant to people or mean as much. So, my question is, how is the church preparing for the future?**

...**Elise:** Thank you, Holy Father. I love how you spoke about unity, and I just want to say we had some Holy Spirit moments here this morning, and we all come together and that is something that is so important for the future. And for my final question, I'd like to ask, **how can we as young people make sure we are part of the conversation about the future?**

...**Katie Prejean McGrady:** Thank you so much for your wisdom and insight. I know that we all really appreciate it. Holy Father, I want to repeat those three questions you just challenged us to pray through. What can I offer the Church right now? How can I help others know Christ? And how can I build peace in the world? And all of this conversation — and we're so grateful you've taken the time to join us — we didn't develop any of this in a vacuum or in secret.

It wasn't just a room full of people putting words in anybody's mouth. There are actually 40 young people. They're sitting right next to the stage that we're on. We just want to acknowledge — if y'all would stand up, if you were part of some of these Zoom calls that we had in anticipation of this. These young people helped us pray, helped us discuss. I want them to get their moment.... But I do have one last question, Holy Father...we just want to ask what's bringing you hope right now, and what's your hope for the future of this Church, and how can we help you?

Pope Leo: Well, thank you very much. It's a really good question. I think it's important to repeat that young people are part of the Church's present and also the hope for the future of the Church. ... *[here the transcript continues with the Holy Father's final message of hope and unity]*

VIII. Appendix E: Parish Ministers' Insights

1. What are you noticing about the generation currently entering middle and high school? Their parents? The elementary-age young people who are coming next? *(responses were collected, then grouped by theme)*

TECHNOLOGY:

- Young people today are growing up with constant access to technology and social media. They are globally connected and aware of trends and cultural moments instantly.
- Many of their parents are also very tech-savvy and understand much of what their children are encountering online.
- There is a growing number of parents pushing back against the norm—delaying phones, limiting technology, or choosing not to give kids devices at all. These parents often need support because they feel like they're going against the grain.
- We may see an increase in teens struggling with technology addiction.
- Adults today gained access to technology only after becoming independent, so we never really learned how to set healthy boundaries for ourselves. Today's young people might eventually become better at self-regulation if they are intentionally taught how to use technology responsibly.
- Parents need to model healthy habits—being intentional about when, why, and how they use their phones.
- Both adults & kids tend to use their phones to avoid uncomfortable social interactions, even simple conversations with strangers.
- Not necessarily more social in the sense of interacting with others in-person; more social in terms of the various social media and platforms that allow them to interact globally online.

MENTAL HEALTH/OVERWHELM/BUSYNESS:

- Families are stressed, overwhelmed with work, financial challenges especially after the pandemic
- Elem & Middle school students talk about disorders (OCD, anxiety, ADHD) and the meds that they are on like it's a club; also talk about being differently abled (neurodiversity)
- Seeing lots of issues related to identity and the need to belong.
- They are very immature. It is difficult to form them because of struggles with inattentiveness.
- Short attention-span - "We're not a dopamine hit."
- Don't see "instant gratification" mindset of kids or parents going away. Parents want everything all at once.
- Catechist reported taking phones away at retreats. Kids struggle for the first 12 hours, then start to experience real connection.
- The current 6th graders and younger are on fire for their faith and want in-person community and support. The parents want the same and are encouraging it. Relationships are important. The 7th through last year of college seem to struggle with mental health issues; they don't want to try new things and meet new people and they are overscheduled.
- Kids are seeking kindness, caring, and genuine relationships with other kids who have values similar to theirs which they may not be finding in their social connections at school or otherwise

OCIA/(LACK OF) ENGAGEMENT:

- Youth Ministry today does not attract kids as before, children seem unsure of what it is.
- High school students aren't challenged enough about their faith
- Observed more people coming to OCIA through friends, rather than church.
- For those "new seekers" to OCIA, can currently offer individual guidance, sort of a "buddy system". As numbers increase, this tailored guidance will no longer be available.
- Problem with compliance, having enough adult volunteers.

RELATIONSHIP & COMMUNITY:

- Our goal is relationship building and that is not what the kids are seeking - "We used to introduce teens to Jesus. Now we have to introduce teens to relationship, period."
- People used to build a community, looking at parish for community events.
- Current understanding of "community" is different, no longer localized, seek digital communities.

- The Catholic church has not changed the definition of community. Need to merge the different understandings to appeal to current youth.
- People no longer tied to local church, go to different parishes - how to build relationship or a safe sharing environment between groups of kids with no previous interaction?
- Seeing only core group of kids attend events. Others will come to one event and not return.
- Advice to focus on those that do come, they will evangelize others.
- It's important for adult volunteers to step back if kids are having good conversation among themselves.

2. What feels "stuck" in your ministry with young people?

"STUCK" INTERACTIONS WITH TEENS:

- Generating interest and participation feels challenging; even when opportunities are offered, the response is limited.
- It's unclear what truly interests today's young people and how to draw them in.
- The current curriculum feels limiting. It doesn't fit the needs of this generation of students or their families. There's a sense that something new is needed—something that starts from a different place and takes a different approach.
- Attention spans are shorter than ever and some tools, like videos, no longer hold their attention

"STUCK" INTERACTIONS WITH PARENTS:

- Dealing with a checklist world - when people hear they don't have to, they drift away
- In elementary, middle, and HS, parents do not see and value "us" as the priority—sports, travel, etc, always comes first, but we are the BEST GOOD. Always include parents so that they see we are the best good.
- "Sacrament years" seem to be of the most importance for parents
- Commitment and follow through is inconsistent, especially among high schoolers
- Big trips and retreats have gotten so expensive that I don't even pursue them. My families can't afford it.
- My immigrant families struggle to understand some of the norms in the American church
- Parents not feeling that they are equipped to provide formation at home.

"STUCK" INTERACTIONS WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS:

- Finding and retaining quality volunteers is an uphill battle
- Other people on staff/in the parish who have an outdated mental model of YM but still hold sway
- Some people (including parents) have a CCD view of what youth ministry should be. They're too concerned about content and forget about the importance of relationship.
- My volunteers equate everything with Confirmation. I'm really concerned they will all drop off once we try to shift from Confirmation to those activities they love being just...youth ministry.

LEADERS' REFLECTIONS ON "STUCKNESS" IN THEMSELVES:

- This year is challenging with all of the sacramental prep changes; feel stuck doing mainly sacramental prep this year as a wave 1 parish
- I don't know how to effectively engage them where they are (the internet) without coming up against safe environment issues
- I know one size fits all won't work but my bandwidth is limited. I spend all my time just maintaining (barely) versus being missionary

3. What is bringing you hope?

- Seeing a faith in our young people that seems different than 25 years ago. Not afraid to show their faith.
- Seeing young people passionate about community issues and wanting to do something about it.
- Seeing young people trying to live as missionary disciples.
- Leaders (pastors and laity) who are willing to fail in order to try something new.
- It's scary but I'm actually kind of looking forward to having more freedom in ministry without the "product" of Confirmation to sell, police, and manage
- The Holy Spirit is still at work! Young people still say yes to God!

VIII. Appendix F: National Research and Additional Resources

Key National & Universal Documents:

- ***Listen, Teach, Send: A National Pastoral Framework for Ministries with Youth & Young Adults*** (2024) – PDF versions (English & Spanish) available via USCCB site; hard copy bilingual edition from OSV.
- ***Directory for Catechesis*** (2020) – not available digitally; let OFYYAM know if you need a copy and cannot afford to purchase one from the publisher, OSV.
- ***Christus Vivit*** (2019): Click “ES” for Spanish version:
https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html
- ***The Joy of Adolescent Catechesis*** (2017; bilingual): <https://nfcym.leadlms.com/resources/582>
- ***Renewing the Vision/Renovemos La Visión*** (1997):
 - Summary of *Renewing the Vision*: <https://nfcym.org/resources/topics/catholic-youth-ministry/>

NFCYM (National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry) – Projects & Resources:

- **The Drexel Project – Youth & Service:** www.linktr.ee/AOBDrexelProject
- **Models & Methods of YM, Adolescent Catechesis, Intercultural Competency/ABIDE, Pastoral Care, and more**
- **YM Program Assessment & Evaluation:** <https://nfcym.org/resources/topics/program-assessment-evaluation/>

NCCL (National Community of Catechetical Leaders) – Catechesis with Adolescents Resources:

- <https://www.ncclcatholic.org/adolescents>

A few relevant national studies:

- **Catholic Youth Ministry Field Study (2020-2023):** <https://nfcym.org/field-survey/>
- **2024 NFCYM Study on Pastors’ Perspectives on Accompanying Young People – Executive Summary**
- **Life Teen – 2024 State of Catholic Youth in America** ([English PDF](#) – also available via Life Teen’s [site](#)):
- **Yellow Line Digital – 2025 Reaching Next Gen Catholics** ([English PDF](#) – also available via YLD’s [site](#))

Springtide Research Institute – Select Reports & Data Drops (More at <https://springtideresearch.org/research>)

- 2022 REPORT: [Where Spirituality, Religion, and Mental Health Intersect for Young People](#)
- 2024 REPORT: A First Look at Generation Alpha: <https://springtideresearch.org/thirteen-a-first-look-at-gen-alpha>
- [Gen Alpha and Religion: What 13-Year-Olds Say](#)
- [What Young People Want from Youth Ministry](#)
- [Talking about religion at home matters for teen faith](#)
- [Do teens’ religious beliefs and practices differ between genders?](#)
- [A Religious Snapshot of US Latina/o Youth](#)
- [How do sports play into young people’s religious involvement?](#)
- [Do young people experience sacred moments?](#)
- [What happens after young people leave religious institutions?](#)
- 2025 REPORT: [Four Dimensions of Young People’s Spiritual and Religious Lives](#)
- [Why Do Young People Volunteer?](#)
- 2026 REPORT: [A Framework for Young People’s Religious Involvement](#)



Figure 2: TENx10 Collaboration’s Faith Formation Framework

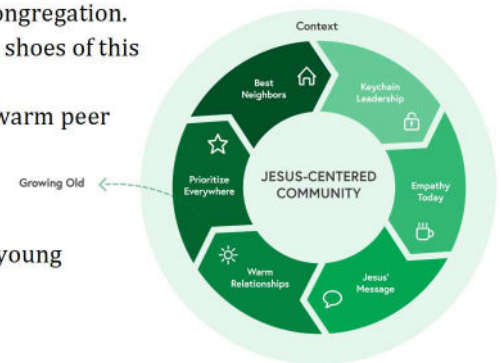
TENx10 Collaboration (<https://www.tenx10.org/>) – Faith Formation Framework (see image above/right)

Fuller Youth Institute (FYI) (More at <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog>)

- **What you need to know about Gen Alpha in 2026:** <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/gen-alpha-in-2026>
- **Meet the Gen Alpha “Nones”: The teens asking quiet questions about God:** <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/meet-the-gen-alpha-nones>
- **3 ways every youth leader can support young people struggling with mental health:** <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/support-mental-health>
- **How to help a lonely generation find belonging:** <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/help-a-lonely-generation-find-belonging>
- **5 surprising strengths your small church can leverage to grow young:** <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/leverage-to-grow-young>
- **2 Social Emotional Learning (SEL) tips for teen discipleship** <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/social-emotional-learning>
- **Building a culture of “keychain leadership” in your church:** <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/creating-a-culture-of-keychain-leadership>
- **5 tips to rethink the strengths and gifts of youth with disabilities in your ministry:** <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/5-tips-to-rethink-the-strengths-and-gifts-of-youth-with-disabilities>
- **How can your church listen across generations?** <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/how-can-your-church-listen-across-generations>
- **5 steps to practice keychain leadership with students:** <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/5-steps-to-practice-keychain-leadership-with-students>
- **Your voice matters to young people, no matter your age. Here’s why.** <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/your-voice-matters>
- **Do older people really want young people in church?** <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/older-people-want-young-people>

Growing Young (2016) Summary: Six Key Commitments of churches that are growing young:

1. Unlock keychain leadership: Instead of centralizing authority, empower others—especially young people.
2. Prioritize young people (and families) everywhere: Instead of giving lip service to how much young people matter, look for creative ways to tangibly support, resource, and involve them in all facets of your congregation.
3. Empathize with today’s young people: Instead of judging or criticizing, step into the shoes of this generation.
4. Fuel a warm community: Instead of focusing on cool worship or programs, aim for warm peer and intergenerational friendships.
5. Take Jesus’ message seriously: Instead of asserting formulaic gospel claims, welcome young people into a Jesus-centered way of life.
6. Be the best neighbors: Instead of condemning the world outside your walls, enable young people to neighbor well locally and globally.



Sticky Faith (2011) Summary: What creates Sticky Faith?

- Intergenerational Relationships: Despite the age segregation that exists in our churches and broader culture, each young person is greatly benefited when surrounded by a team of five adults. We call this the new 5:1 ratio.
- Whole Gospel: Many young people see faith like a jacket: something they can put on or take off based on their behavior. We seek to help students develop a more robust understanding of the gospel, one that integrates faith into all aspects of life.
- Partnership with Families: Research demonstrates that parents are the #1 influencers when it comes to spirituality in young people—yes, even teenagers. We help leaders develop new ways to partner with parents, empowering them to nurture faith in their families.
- A Safe Place for Doubt: Doubt is not toxic to faith; silence is. Young people want conversations in response to their hardest questions, not just answers. We offer tools and training for these discussions that deepen the faith of everyone involved.

Figure 3 Six Key Commitments from Growing Young