



WHY YOUTH MINISTRY IN YOUR PARISH?

In October 2023, Archbishop Leo gathered input from the faithful about ministry priorities. Among lay respondents, “youth” was identified as the top priority (15.6% - the largest percentage in any category). Among priests in the Archdiocese, “youth” ranked seventh (7.8%).

To highlight why youth are such a significant priority, the Office of Catholic Youth (OCY) is sharing a broad overview of what youth ministries - and our culture as a whole—are seeing with today’s youth, and why it is critical to root youth ministry efforts at the parish level.

Recent research* highlights key factors that illustrate why both priests and laypeople share a concern about serving younger congregants, those of “Gen Z” and “Gen Alpha”:

A GROWING OPENNESS TO SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

More young people are open to spiritual exploration than previous generations, but they need guidance.

RISING BELIEF IN A “HIGHER POWER”

In 2023, 1 in 3 teens believed in a higher power, up from 1 in 4 in 2020.

A LACK OF RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST

Though 1 in 3 teens claim a Christian identity, many do not have a meaningful relationship with Christ.

SHORT ATTENTION SPANS

On average, Gen Z youth have an attention span of 8 seconds and consume 4 hours of social media daily, mostly in short videos.

KEY POINTS OF DISASSOCIATION

Two critical phases where teens disengage from faith are the transition from elementary school to high school and from high school to post-secondary school.

In addition, many young people experience anxiety and loneliness. They long for meaning and purpose in their lives and a community where they belong. Given all these factors, it is vital to accompany young people in their faith journey.

**The State of Catholic Youth in America, published by LifeTeen, 2024; available upon request.*

How can we keep young people engaged in the faith during these important formative years, and offer them the support they need?

Parish youth ministry can provide the perfect setting for accompanying, forming and discipling our youth.

Although many different models of youth ministry have been tried, **the most effective way to minister to young people is to provide large group formation with adult mentors.** This approach provides diversity, sustainability and meaningful engagement, and offers the best opportunity for long-term success. Other models, such as small groups, leader-based, or digitally-focused, while well-intentioned, have been shown to be less effective in addressing young people's needs for purpose, support and community.

The **Office of Catholic Youth** exists to help youth and young adults encounter, love and serve Jesus Christ. OCY serves parishes, priests, youth ministers, and ministry leaders by helping establish and grow youth ministries that meet the unique needs of their communities. We provide resources and support for deeper faith engagement with young parishioners and the youth in the surrounding areas.

For more information, please contact the OCY at youth@archtoronto.org or 416.599.7676. We look forward to working you to support the youth of your parish.

