



2007 Group Leader's Manual



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INTRODUCTION

Greetings in Christ!

Thank you for deciding to join us this summer for a Franciscan University Youth Conference. Thank you again for all the work you are doing on behalf of the youth you serve. Organizing a group to come to a youth conference is a challenge. You have to keep one eye on the big picture and one on the details while juggling them all at the same time. Many of you are full-time youth ministers who thrive (to a certain extent) on chaos or maybe you missed the meeting and everyone voted you in charge. Either way, this Group Organizer's Manual is designed to help you through a multi-dimensional process.

Take heart in this simple fact: God loves you dearly. The Father loves you perfectly, without reservation or condition. He delights in your desire to serve Him but it is not a prerequisite to experiencing His grace, peace or joy.

Remembering this fact will give you strength in times of confusion, doubt, and exhaustion. It will help you focus on what is important and inspire you to a deeper relationship with Christ. All of us at Franciscan University, the regional organizers, and their staff and volunteers are praying for you and your youth. May the God of all comfort grant you peace and joy as you walk in His will.

PRAY ALWAYS

It is vital that you are in constant prayer throughout your time of preparation. It is so easy for us to mistake being busy serving God for having a strong relationship with Christ. By saying yes to the role of being a Group Organizer, you become very dangerous -- very dangerous to the prince of darkness, that is. Satan wants to steal, kill and destroy the life of teens. We want to provide an opportunity for young people to meet Jesus and receive the abundant life He alone can offer. Satan will do all he can to prevent this, including sending extra temptation, distractions, and worries your way. Cover yourself with a mantle of grace and put on the armor of God. You are more than a conqueror in Christ. Stay in Christ through prayer, receiving the Sacraments, and offering your work as a daily spiritual sacrifice.

SECTION 1: BEFORE THE CONFERENCE

DEVELOPING YOUR STRATEGY

One of the best ways of handling the many facets of being a Group Organizer is to develop a sound strategy and timeline for handling all the arrangements, tasks, and details that need to be completed. Maybe you have a full year, maybe 6 months, maybe a lot less. Whatever your circumstances, getting organized early and staying on task will result in a better trip for your youth and a less stressful time for yourself. Let's start with five logistical areas that need to be dealt with: promotion, transportation, housing, fundraising, and follow-up.

PROMOTION

Promotion is key to any event. How you chose to promote the conference will effect the response you get and the overall experience the young people will have. Enthusiasm is contagious. Your passion for what you are doing is one of your best assets. There are three groups to whom you will be promoting the conference: your pastor, the parents, and the youth.

Pastors

The support of your pastor is immeasurably beneficial. Parents look to their parish priest, their shepherd, for guidance and often align their feelings about an activity with the feelings of their pastor. Some pastors will be naturally enthusiastic, some might need to be convinced. By presenting him with your organizational strategy as soon as possible and keeping him updated, you'll keep his confidence and sustain his enthusiasm. Request the pastor's help in promoting the conference through announcements at Mass and supportive conversations with parents and youth. Invite both the pastor and associate pastor to come to the conference with you, if possible. Finally, be open and willing to hear his questions and concerns, as well as his advice. His experience can provide you with valuable insight.

Parents

Promoting to the parents can be challenging. You may already have your parents, confidence. If not, convincing them to let you take their children away for a weekend can be difficult especially with the recent clergy scandal weighing heavy on their minds. Clearly share your plan to keep their children safe. Presenting the benefits of the conference and demonstrating your leadership abilities through responsible and organized planning will go far to allay those concerns. Here is a suggested plan to get you going on recruiting parents:

- **Send a letter!** Start with a preliminary letter home to parents, inviting them to an informational meeting regarding the conference. Briefly describe the weekend and, if possible, include quotes from parents of past participants. Outline financial and time commitments that will need to be fulfilled. Follow up this letter with a personal invitation to the meeting.
- **Give a visual!** At this informational night show the Franciscan University Youth Conference promotional video. Have parents whose teens have already attended a conference available to help answer questions.
- **What's your goal?** Clearly share the primary goal of the conference: To evangelize youth with the gospel message of Jesus Christ and to deal with the many challenging aspects of their lives according to the teachings of Holy Scripture and Church Tradition.
- **Enlist help!** Enlist parents to help promote the conference after the meeting.

TIP:

If you can demonstrate the value of this weekend to the parents, your efforts in recruiting teens will be much easier.

Youth

Successfully promoting the conference to the youth requires creativity and enthusiasm. You are trying to convince teens who have dozens of social summer options to give up a weekend of their lives to grow in their faith.

- **Fly Away!** Put together a promotional flier describing the unique experience of the youth conference.
- **Get ‘em Together!** Promote a specific evening where you can show the promotional video to the teens, have testimonials from past participants, and answer any questions they might have. Have an initial interest sign-up. Make it a FUN night in order to allow the teens to socialize with other teens that would be going on the trip. It will make the trip more appealing.
- **Get Personal!** Follow up this meeting with a personal call to invite each youth and answer any questions.
- **Keep Promoting!** Develop a shorter presentation about the conference with the official conference video to show at other events. This will help you reach teens who won’t come to the special informational meeting.

TIP:

A personal invitation works best with teens—just say, “I am going to a Franciscan University Youth Conference. You would love it and I want you to come with me!” Be sure to invite and welcome all teens, especially those who may not have a strong faith life. Take extra care with those youth whose parents might force them to go. Whatever reason appears on the surface, it is important to remember God is calling them to the conference and will work in their lives. Your witness and love will help open a closed heart.

TRANSPORTATION

In some cases, you may have to cover a great deal of ground to attend a Franciscan Youth Conference. Securing safe, reliable, and fully insured transportation will take some effort. The following suggestions will make the process easier.

Cost is definitely an issue when planning a long trip. But in addition to the cost factor, consider travel distance, the size of your group, special needs of any members of your group, and use of travel time when making your decision.

You could opt for charter buses, church vans, or personal vehicles. If you plan on renting any large vans, do so very early. Summer is a difficult time to rent (you’ll be competing with many different church and family groups). If you go with personal vehicles, make sure they are safe. If your group is 30+ in size, consider a bus. Having everyone together in one vehicle builds community, is easier to manage, and gives you many trip programming options. If money is a concern, have individuals or an organization sponsor some or all of the transportation costs. People will support this trip financially if you enthusiastically explain the benefits. If you use rental vans or personal vehicles, be sure to budget fuel costs into the overall price of the trip.

Through the use of online services or AAA, you can easily map out the safest and shortest route to your conference. Plan meal stops. Do not assume that at noon you’ll be near restaurants or a rest stop that can accommodate your group. Call ahead to restaurants, if possible, to save on break times. Leave nothing to chance.

TIP:

One suggestion is a ban on all personal electronics during your trip. There is nothing more detrimental to community building than everyone strapping on headphones and slipping into isolation mode.

For the return trip, organize a phone tree. When you’re an hour away from home, call parents with the time the teens will be back. This will keep you from waiting an hour for the last person to be picked up. The phone tree can also be used in the event of a breakdown or other delay.

Travel time to and from the conference can be incredibly valuable for ministry and community building. Suggestions for the trip home will be included later in the manual. On the trip there, direct the use of time but not all of it. Youth need down time and “just hanging out” time with friends. You should try to keep

things relatively light. Many youth will be pumped about the conference and not too focused while others may be nervous and scared and do not need the added pressure of deep conversation or probing questions.

Be sure to pray during the trip, especially the Rosary. Require youth to either bring a Rosary or provide them with one. Also have “How to Pray the Rosary” cards or sheets for those who may not have the prayers memorized. Many youth will not have experienced communal praying of the Rosary. Play fun, non-threatening, get-to-know-you icebreakers. If you sense the group is open, have them share with their small groups about expectations, fears, and desires for the conference. What would you like God to do for you? In you? Take time to personally talk to each person. Encourage your chaperones to check in on their small group members.

HOUSING

For some conferences, housing is provided. For others you will have to book hotel rooms. Follow the directions outlined in your registration packet to secure housing. Do not wait until the last minute. If your diocesan policy says adults cannot sleep in the same room as teens, then make sure your adults are in nearby rooms and have a chaperone watch the hall to make sure everyone stays in and gets to sleep.

It is very important that in large rooms with many different groups the chaperones stay awake and aware of their youth until they fall asleep. There should be no horseplay, throwing of objects, or rude speech within the sleeping quarters. You are responsible for your own group’s members within the sleeping quarters.

TIP:

If you are sleeping in a gym or tent, be sure everyone brings a sleeping bag and pillow.

FUNDRAISING

When you add up registration fees, housing, transportation, T-shirt costs, etc., it is not cheap to make this trip happen. But by developing a sound budget and an aggressive fundraising plan, as well as being a good steward of resources, this trip is within everyone’s reach.

Add up all your costs and divide it by the number of people going. This will give you the amount you need to charge each person. Are you asking adult chaperones to pay? Are you going to have a scholarship fund to ensure no one gets left behind? Do you need to collect all deposit money up front or will your parish pay for deposits and then get reimbursed when you collect fees? Will you have emergency funds? Answering these questions will keep you from missing a deadline or losing spots due to non-payment.

Be sure to have your pastor’s permission before engaging in any type of fundraising. Then set a goal and map a strategy for reaching that goal. One idea is to ask someone to help sponsor a young person’s trip. Maybe they can underwrite the cost by \$50 or \$100. Or, someone could underwrite the cost of the bus or van. If this is not an option, you can organize spaghetti dinners, bake sales, car washes or more traditional methods of raising money.

Be sure to include youth in all aspects of fundraising. Have them make appeals from the pulpit or to businesses. Do not be afraid to make them earn it. Do not get discouraged. If God is calling you to bring youth to a conference, He will provide the means to make it happen.

TIP:

Many organizations, such as the Knights of Columbus, actively support youth outreach. Many businesses, like Krispy Kreme Doughnuts, have great fundraising opportunities available. Just check with businesses in your community.

FOLLOW UP

Specific ideas on effective follow up will be included later in this manual. It is important, however, to begin planning early what will be in place for youth following the conference. All the pieces of the conference – from the liturgies, to the talks, music, and Adoration – are designed to open youth’s hearts to Christ so that He can plant the seeds of faith, hope, and love. Without good follow up, the seeds will die and not produce fruit. Please include solid follow up as part of your organizational strategy.

RECRUITING AND TRAINING YOUR ADULT MINISTRY TEAM

A Franciscan University Youth Conference is a profound spiritual and sometimes emotional experience that leads young people to deeper conversion. Having adults who are properly trained to help facilitate and process the experience will be key to the outcome of your group's experience. This point cannot be emphasized enough. In addition, we are making every effort to provide the safest, most secure environment for the young people we serve. Therefore, we ask for your utmost diligence and discernment in the recruiting and training of adult chaperones. The following are some criteria and guidelines to keep in mind as you prepare your team of adults.

PROTECTING GOD'S CHILDREN

If you work with youth in any capacity at your parish, you are probably very familiar with the phrase "Protecting God's Children." The tragic scandals that have dominated headlines the past few years serve as a continual reminder of the sacred responsibility we have when serving youth. We need to do our very best to keep young people safe. Franciscan University Youth Outreach supports the U.S. Bishops' efforts to make this happen. In addition, Franciscan University has revised its policies and requirements for adults wishing to serve at a Franciscan Summer Youth Conference.

- **Age:** Every adult chaperone has to be at least 21 years old. (In the past it was 18 years old.)
- **Approval:** Your diocese must approve every chaperone that will be on your adult ministry team in accordance to the standards set forth by your Bishop's Decree on Child Protection. Each diocese has guidelines and training that need to be completed and followed. Find out what they are and implement them with your adult chaperones. Adults who have not been approved by their diocese cannot participate as a chaperone. There will be a form in your registration packet that will need to be filled out and signed before you come on site that declares all of your adults have been trained and approved to work with youth.
There absolutely will be NO EXCPTIONS to this policy. If you are unclear about your particular diocesan requirements, call your diocesan office and find out what the policy is right away.
- **On our end:** Every speaker, musician, or entertainer hired by Franciscan University to serve at a summer youth conference will be background checked by a professional company.

If you have any other questions regarding our policies call the registration office of the conference you will be attending or Franciscan University's Youth Outreach Office.

Some people might be offended when questioned about their backgrounds or that they are required to be trained in the proper ways to relate to young people. These situations require understanding yet firmness. Resistance to the policies and procedures might be the first indication that someone might not be an appropriate choice to be an adult chaperone. But remember, your first responsibility is to the youth. Better to hurt feelings than to allow a hurt child.

RECRUITING ADULT MINISTRY TEAM MEMBERS

TIP:

Before you begin recruiting, say a prayer that God reveals to you the people He wants to be a part of your trip. Do not forget for a moment the great love God has for you and the youth. He wants to help with every detail!

What does the ideal chaperone look like? What is the ideal personality of an adult leader? The short answer is, there is no short answer. Great adult ministers come in all ages, shapes, sizes, backgrounds and personalities. Don't be too quick to reject a potential leader because they do not fit your preconceived notions. If there are any requirements that you should use, they should be the following:

- **Love God?** They need to love God. Are they active in their faith development? Are they pursuing a relationship with Christ? This is key because they will be an example for your youth throughout the trip. How can they help a young person grow in their faith if they are not trying to do so in their own lives? Your chaperones should be tour guides, not travel agents in matters of faith. They should lead by example, not just tell the young people where to go.
- **Love Youth?** They need to love youth. Specifically, they need to be willing to lay down their lives in both big and little ways during the conference trip. These trips are very demanding. Loving youth could mean staying up later than everyone else to make sure the youth are asleep. It could mean waking early to save seats in the main hall. It could mean focusing on the youth instead of themselves during adoration. **It will mean serving the youth and sacrificing for the youth, even when they are rowdy, rude, self-centered, and obnoxious.**

If these two qualities exist – love for God and love of youth – you have discovered a solid-gold treasure. Recruit that adult! With a little training, this person will make the difference between a good experience and a great experience for your youth!

Here are few ideas:

- **You are not alone!** Enlist others to help in your search. These would include past chaperones, new chaperones, your pastor, friends, and parents, etc.
- **Network:** Use as many means as possible to communicate your needs. Church bulletin, bulletin boards and announcements at Mass.
- **Who's already involved?** Approach your Young Adult group if you have one.
- **Get Personal:** Ask people personally. Most people **are** waiting for a personal invitation.
- **Be Prepared:** Have a prepared outline of the commitment a chaperone would have to make. No one likes to find out that there is more to a commitment than originally outlined.
- **Start Early:** Recruiting does not happen overnight, so start early. Waiting until the last minute to find adult chaperones can result in the complete termination of your plans to attend the conference. At minimum, it can cause stress and anxiety.
- **Boot camp isn't for everyone:** The conference weekend is rigorous, with little sleep and lots of activity. Remember this when recruiting chaperones. There will be little downtime; chaperones are there for the teens, and need to be attentive to that role. Is your chaperone strong enough to be able to give in this way? (Remember, not everyone is cut out for this job!)
- **Be aware of "Conference Junkies:** A chaperone should not be someone who wants to go to "just one more conference" because they are now too old to go as a participant. Sometimes past participants are great chaperones because they know what to expect and are in a good place spiritually, but beware of those who are going to "get" more than "give."

All of our sites have set ratios between adults and youth. Please consult your registration packet for the requirements for your site. On average, the ratio is one adult for every ten youth. This is always split on gender lines. Example: If you are bringing 26 youth to a conference, 22 girls and four boys, you will need at least three female adult chaperones and one male chaperone.

This is necessary to monitor sleeping areas and to preserve a safe environment. Your chaperones will also serve as small group discussion facilitators. Without enough leaders, even the size of small groups becomes unmanageable. You will need enough shepherds to be aware of special needs and pray for and with the youth, especially during Adoration.

Each conference site also depends on chaperones to maintain order. Chaperones need to be an example of obedience and cooperate with the policies as well as with conference staff and volunteers.

Included is a timeline to use when recruiting and training adults. Keep in mind, you may have to drastically adjust this for your particular circumstances.

8-10 months prior to the conference: Begin to plant seeds about needing help for the summer conference. Be prepared to answer questions about time commitments, responsibilities, etc. Keep contact information on all who seem interested. Set up your training schedule for adult leaders.

6-8 months prior: Begin bulletin and verbal announcements at Mass about the opportunity for youth to attend and the need for adult volunteers.

4-6 months prior: Determine approximate numbers of youth who will attend the conference, and decide on the minimum number of adults needed. Make a list of possible volunteers and begin recruiting by phone. Schedule an open information meeting and show the promo video.

2 months prior: Make sure you have all the necessary paperwork for the conference site. Make sure your diocese has approved your volunteers. Execute the training sessions for your adult chaperones. Hold two or three meetings where your adult ministry team and the youth can pray and get to know each other.

TRAINING ADULT MINISTRY TEAM MEMBERS

Although we call them chaperones or adult volunteers, they are truly an integral part of a ministry team. This role might seem daunting to some adults. But with some basic training and a good amount of prayer, they can do it. You should seek to instill a servant's heart and attitude in your team. In addition there are some very practical, necessary roles they will need to fill. At all times they will be disciplinarians. At other times they will facilitate small groups, pray with teens, and maybe do some counseling. They should be available at all times to care for the needs of the youth, whether it be helping a youth locate a lost sleeping bag or lending an ear to a teen who needs to talk. Team members need to help the youth process what they are experiencing throughout the weekend and support them when the conference is over.

After you assemble your ministry team, you should schedule two to four training sessions to pray with them and pass on some basic wisdom and knowledge. You will need to cover the logistical details of the trip, the spiritual nature of the conference, how to lead a small group and how to pray with and counsel a teen.

TIP:

There are four outlines for you to use in the appendix section of this manual.
Each meeting should include time to pray and bond as a team.

Do not take shortcuts when training and preparing your adult ministry team. As they become more familiar with the conference details and their responsibilities, nervousness will decrease and confidence will increase. The success of your conference experience depends on the teamwork of all involved in facilitating the event.

BASICS OF TEEN CULTURE AND SPIRITUALITY

For those of you who are professional youth ministers this section will probably be a review of familiar material. For others it might come as a bit of a shock. The reality is that through the media and other social factors, a distinct youth culture with its own set of “rules” and ideas about life, values, morality, and relationships has emerged. The bottom line is what used to be isn’t anymore. Black is white and white doesn’t really exist. For many young people there is not even solid ground to begin a meaningful dialogue about truth. Here are several trends and thoughts that permeate youth culture to help equip you to deal with issues that might come up during the conference weekend.

“BAD” IS GOOD

Madonna and Britney Spears bumping and grinding in a pseudo-sexual lesbian dance ending with an open mouth kiss. Justin Timberlake ripping Janet Jackson’s top off during the Super Bowl halftime show. The bottom line is “bad” is popular, it gets you noticed, it gives you sex appeal. Guys need to be “thugs” who use women. Girls have to be extremely sexual, not afraid to dress provocatively and use sex to manipulate. Many popular music artists flaunt their sexuality, their crudeness, and their self-centeredness. Madonna sings, “I am bored with the concept of right and wrong.” The more immorality you flaunt, the more popular you become—as long as you wrap it in a sharp-dressed, sexy package.

POSTMODERN “SELF-RULES”

What is true? What is right? The answer that young people get from the culture is, “Whatever you feel.” It’s the philosophy that they receive from music, television, and movies, even in school. It is the great crisis facing ministers who are trying to evangelize young people. Youth have grown cold to the idea that God or the Bible or the Church should have any say in how they live their lives. In one recent survey, 83 percent of young people stated that circumstances determined morality. Only 6 percent believed that moral truth is absolute. That’s unacceptable, especially when Christ is the ultimate absolute truth. Most young people have no problem accepting Jesus as the great life raft. He’s there to rescue you if screw up but they hope they won’t need Him. Many see Jesus as just another voice in the mix—not as the voice that brought the world into existence or called Lazarus from the tomb. Materialism and hedonism are the gospel that is being proclaimed loudly and without shame.

SEX HAS NO RULES

Premarital sex may not be the worst sin you can commit, but sexual sin is definitely the most popular among youth. While teen pregnancy rates have declined in recent years along with the percentage of young people who are having intercourse, there has been a significant increase in other sexual behaviors. There has been an increase in the number of kids who are experimenting with oral sex and homosexuality. Young men are being poisoned and enslaved by internet pornography. Casual weekend “hook ups” happen at an alarming rate. Sexually transmitted diseases are still on the rise. These activities are just as damaging as teenage pregnancy to the souls of young people. Young people are being led to believe that sex is recreational, people are to be used for pleasure, and thus are left unable to form committed relationships based on true love.

THE MEDIA

There is not a single advertising agency, music producer, or movie director who does not see the world of young people as the great marketplace. The media world of young people, where beauty is almost absent and character counts for nothing spews forth very effective messages that neither challenge nor affirm young people. Rather, it manipulates their fears, their doubts, their confusions, and their desire for something real. Trends and fads rule in place of virtue and character. Now, not everything out there is bad, but most of it is. Even religiously active young people are directly connected with their Church only a few hours a week—less than the number of hours they listen to music or watch television or movies each day. The average teen watches over three hours of television each day. They are pushed, pulled, and twisted into pursuing the philosophy of MTV and similar magazines and companies, whose only real interest is financial gain. It sounds very bleak. It is.

DIVORCE

Over half the youth in America will witness the break-up of their parent's marriage. Half of those youth will witness the break-up of a second marriage. The emotional, psychological and spiritual fallout of divorce is staggering. Lower self-esteem, psychological disorders, social interaction difficulties, increased drug use, increased sexual activity and suicidal tendencies have all been linked to divorce. The world always highlights the situations of teens who seem to have adapted to divorce. The majority of youth do not fare well at all. You need to be aware of the youth in your group who have or are experiencing divorce. Pray especially for their healing.

SUICIDE AND SELF MUTILATION

Suicide remains one of the greatest problems among young people. It is the number two killer of young people. Thousands succeed in killing themselves each year, while tens of thousands struggle through failed attempts and suicidal thoughts. Teens lack the life experience to understand that when things are at their worst they will get better. We need to hold out the hope of Jesus Christ. We need to help young people see that Christ is with them always and will never leave them. Another frightening trend among young people is self-mutilation. Young people use knives, pins, and other sharp objects to make themselves bleed. Many also burn and hit themselves. In extreme cases, young people will even break their own bones. Young people report actually feeling better after this behavior. Internal pain manifests itself with surface mutilation. We can help these youth find healing.

We could include pages and pages of facts, statistics, quotes, and images that would both shock and offend. The point of sharing this information is to help you realize the all-out attack that is being waged against our youth. We need to aggressively and compassionately seek out young people and share the gospel with them in love. Your efforts in getting young people to a Franciscan University Youth Conference could literally change the direction of their lives.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE

With all the materialism and hedonism bombarding our young people, is it possible that any of them are pursuing spirituality at all? The answer is yes but not in the traditional sense. Two thirds of Catholic youth would describe themselves as religious but only 40% of them attend Mass every Sunday. Most pray and even read the Bible, but the emphasis for them is more on the search than a desire for true conversion. New age and eastern religious concepts are promoted in their media; horoscopes can be found on almost every popular teen-oriented website. For them, all options are equal. There is not one true religion. One idea is as good as another. The only thing you need to do is be good, try not to hurt others and you'll go to heaven. The number of lies disguised like truth and the obliteration of real truth have made the spiritual journey of most youth riddled with emptiness.

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

So with all this working against youth, is there any hope? Yes, definitely! The thing to remember is that we have the King of the Universe on our side. He holds all the answers to the deepest questions young people have. HE alone can satisfy the deepest longing in their hearts. There is a place in their hearts where truth should be living. There is a hole in their heart that only Christ can fill. We are ambassadors of the Prince of Peace and the Lord of Lords. We have been given the good news of the Gospel. We need to love young people and teach them about Christ. We need to be patient with them and encourage them. We need to challenge youth and show them the way. It's not difficult. It's not confusing. It's not beyond our ability. We simply need to join the fight to win this generation for Jesus and the Church.

PREPARING THE TEENS

This summer, over 30,000 teens will experience the power and presence of Jesus Christ at a Franciscan Youth Conference and each experience will be amazing in its own way. Some teens will find forgiveness while others will experience healing. Many will have God's unchanging love for them confirmed in their hearts. With such a wide array of experiences, how can you prepare every youth that is coming with you?

First, put your teens in God's hands. He loves them so much more than you do. His love and plan for them are perfect. We need to, in prayer, present our youth to Christ and let Him do what he does best.

- **Pray with them:** Schedule 2-4 meetings to pray with your group and let them know about the different components that go into a youth conference. There will be expressive praise and worship, lively liturgies, small group time and Eucharistic Adoration. There are reproducible handouts explaining each of these components in the appendix section of this manual. Use them with both your youth and the adult ministry team.
- **No exaggerations:** Don't overstate the experience they will have. Specifically do not gear them up for the most emotionally charged weekend of their lives. Most teens are already overly emotional and many live behind a thin veneer that covers deep fears, doubts, and confusion. When Jesus entered the upper room after rising from the dead, His first gift was His peace. Jesus' gift to many young people during the conference is peace and a deep sense that things are going to be all right.
- **Open Wide the Doors:** Encourage young people to be open. Each part of the weekend is only an ingredient in the greater good. It is like baking a cake. Eating a cup of flour or a raw egg might not seem all that appealing, but add sugar cocoa and few other ingredients and let it bake and you have chocolate cake. In the same way, singing songs with hand motions might seem childish and awkward, but when you combine it with all the other parts of the weekend you have something much richer than chocolate cake. Ask your youth to be open to all of the "ingredients" of the weekend so that they can receive the richness of God.
- **Build Community and Unity:** Take time to build community. Although your adult ministry team will be there to help pray with them, the truth is that during Adoration they will be seeking their friends for comfort and to pray with them. Someone who is new to the group or feels like an outsider will not enjoy the richness of that experience. Help everyone to feel they belong.
- **Signed, Sealed and Delivered:** Use these meetings to take care of any clerical work. Collect release forms, medical forms and payments. You may be able to accomplish everything in two meetings or you may need more. Be sure that you do some preparation before the conference.

SMALL GROUPS: EFFECTIVE USE OF VALUABLE TIME

The Franciscan University Youth Conferences are a great evangelistic tool designed to lead young people to Christ and jumpstart the faith of those who already know Christ. But true evangelization, true Catholic evangelization, takes place in community. A powerful weekend of praise, music, liturgy and adoration only finds its truest meaning within the community of young people who come to the conference. Over the last few years, a stronger emphasis has been placed upon small group time.

THE PURPOSE OF SMALL GROUPS

Entire books have been written about small group dynamics. But for the purposes of this manual we will focus on three main reasons why small group time is important to the conference experience:

1. They empower youth ministers
2. They help teens process the weekend
3. They give a bonding experience that will help your efforts to build community.

Empowering you and the other adult ministers is important. People might think a speaker is cool or that the entertainment is funny but the real “heroes” of the conference are you and the other adults. Long after we are gone you will be there to listen to, laugh with, cry with and love the teens. That’s true ministry and evangelization. You have the opportunity to start that process (especially with new freshmen) during the conference. Although they might think the conference was awesome, what will stay with them is the love and encouragement they received from you during the weekend.

Helping teens process the **experience** throughout the weekend is vital. Satan will immediately try to snatch the seeds of faith from their hearts as soon as Christ places them there. How does this happen? Young people have been told that feelings, more than anything, should direct and guide them. Many young people have a powerful experience of Jesus during the weekend. It is often very emotional. Unless we process the weekend with them and take it to the level of faith rather than feelings, many youth walk away from the weekend saying, “Wow, that was a great weekend!” But it doesn’t cause them to change their lives or grow deeper with Christ. It becomes just another good memory. It becomes just another “feeling” they have experienced. When this happens, Satan has successfully snatched away a seed of faith. We need to help young people cross over from being feelings-driven to being faith-driven and confirm the reality of the God who is the center of it all. This needs to happen during small group time.

A powerful **spiritual experience** will often create more questions than answers. Your team needs to be there to answer concerns, questions, and keep young people focused on Christ.

Finally, **community building** is accomplished through the sharing of experiences and lives. Small group time takes the shared experience and facilitates heart-to-heart communication between your youth and adults. It also presents youth with a new mode of relating. Many see for the first time that it is OK to open up and share yourself, and that there are people who will listen and care. It puts the necessary personal, human touch on what otherwise can be perceived as only an event.

ORGANIZING SMALL GROUPS

There are many different opinions regarding how small groups should be organized. Do you have co-ed or boys and girls groups? Do you mix freshmen with upper classmen? Do you keep friends together or use small group as a tool of building new relationships? The following are suggestions based on years of experience. For Franciscan Youth Conferences the recommended format for small groups would be men’s and women’s small groups. This gives freedom for issues to be addressed that might not come up in mixed company. You also do not have to deal with flirtatious behavior during your small groups. There are definitely benefits for mixing and not mixing younger and older students. Older students can often serve as role models for the younger students. However, the issues they are dealing with and their level of spiritual growth and maturity is often very different. For this reason, it is always best to place the youth where they personally will be best served.

The bottom line is you know your own group and its particular needs. If you take this issue to prayer and use your discernment, things will work out.

GUIDELINES FOR SMALL GROUPS

When recruiting your adult ministry team, it is important that the people you work with can keep personal matters in **confidence**. Do not recruit someone who gossips. You need to provide a level of confidentiality to the youth.

One group's policy regarding **confidentiality** might be that unless a youth shares about some type of abuse or wanting to hurt themselves or others, what they share should remain completely confidential within the small group or between the adult and the youth. What about sexual behavior? Some would say that that all pre-marital sexual behavior is destructive. In extreme cases of on-going reckless sexual behavior and the young person expressing no desire for change, then you may need to bring the parents into the situation. If a young person says he or she has had sex in the past and they want to change, then it is probably not necessary to contact the parents. These decisions remain for your discernment.

The ideal situation is to help foster communication between child and parent. If a sensitive situation presents itself, see if there is a way to help the young person trust their parents. Don't try to force this to happen. Often times we don't know the whole story and if we push young people too hard we lose their trust.

If one of your adult ministry team members has doubts about what to do, he or she should first contact you. The next appropriate step is to contact your Pastor. He should decide if a young person needs help and how to make that happen.

Once again, these are suggested guidelines. You know your group members, your pastor's expectations, your parent's expectations and you need to set your own confidentiality policy. This policy needs to be clearly communicated with the youth to prevent unwanted embarrassment or mistrust.

SECTION 2: DURING THE CONFERENCE

THE SPIRITUALITY OF A FRANCISCAN YOUTH CONFERENCE

The youth conferences combine solid Catholic doctrine with a powerful experience of the Holy Spirit. Our conferences use a variety of means to accomplish this. Most are very traditional like the Mass, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Rosary, and Eucharistic Adoration. These are the main ways Jesus wishes to reveal Himself to the Church. We also use the witness of passionate speakers and hosts, talented musicians and entertainers, and the Young Apostles. We also invite young people to open their hearts to the power of the Holy Spirit

Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit will teach all truth. Through expressive praise and worship, youth experience the same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead and gave birth to the Church. The same Holy Spirit that was poured into their hearts at Baptism. Many great movements both within the Church and in Protestant churches are growing on a powerful experience of the presence of God through expressive praise and worship.

AN EXPLANATION OF EXPRESSIVE PRAISE AND WORSHIP

Prayer is a conversation with God. There are many different types of prayer, such as:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Petition Prayer: | Asking God to help us. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intercessory Prayer: | Asking God to help others. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scriptural Prayer: | Meditating on Scripture. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contemplative Prayer: | Meditating quietly, focusing on the Lord. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Repentance Prayer: | Asking God for forgiveness. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rosary Prayer: | Praying and meditating on the Rosary. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Liturgical Prayer: | Praying the prayers of the Church. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thanksgiving Prayer: | Giving thanks to the Lord. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Expressive Prayer: | Praising and worshiping God with our whole being. |

We spend time focusing on Expressive Praise and Worship during the conference because it is a very powerful, very Scriptural way of drawing young people into the presence of God. Young people are looking to give themselves completely to God. Expressive praise and worship is an act that involves their souls, their emotions, their intellects, and their bodies. It puts Gods in His proper place. He is the creator and our God and we are His creations and the family who adores Him. We challenge young people to show more devotion to God than they would to their favorite rock star if they were at a concert.

Sacred Scripture teaches us these things about expressive praise and worship:

- ***Our Praise Brings Joy to God's Heart:***
Psalm 50:23 "Those who offer praise as a sacrifice honor me."

- ***Praise Includes Worshipping God With Our Entire Being:***
Mark 12:30 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength."

- ***Clapping Your Hands:***
Psalm 47:2 "All you peoples, clap your hands; shout to God with joyful cries."

- ***Lifting Your Arms Toward Heaven:***
1 Timothy 2:8 "It is my wish, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger or argument."
Psalm 134:2 "Lift up your hands toward the sanctuary, and bless the Lord."

- ***Dancing Before the Lord:***
Psalm 149:3 "Let them praise His name in festive dance..."
Psalm 150:4 "Give praise with tambourines and dance..."
2 Samuel 6:14 "Then David, girt with a linen apron, came dancing before the Lord with abandon..."

- ***Praising Him with Expressive Music:***
Psalm 150:3 “Give praise with blasts upon the horn, praise him with harp and lyre...”
- ***Glorifying the Lord With a Loud Voice:***
Psalm 33:3 “Sing to God a new song; skillfully play with joyful chant.”
Psalm 47:2 “All you peoples...shout to God with joyful cries...”
- ***God Is Deserving of Our Praise:***
Revelation 4:11 “Worthy are you, Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things; because of your will they came to be and were created.”
Psalm 147:1 “How good to celebrate our God in song; how sweet to give fitting praise.”

Walking into a room with thousands of Catholic youth singing their hearts out to God and lifting their hands up in praise is a beautiful thing. However, the expressive praise and worship at a Franciscan University Youth Conference can be disconcerting at first to those who have never experienced it.

You can do three things to help prepare your youth group for this experience. First give them an overview of what expressive praise is and what they will experience at the conference. Next, assure them that this is not weird or bizarre but rather a sincere outward demonstration of what God is doing in the hearts of young people. Finally, do not be afraid to join in and model this form of prayer while at the conference and afterwards.

Expressive praise and worship was revitalized in the Church through the charismatic renewal over thirty years ago. It sprang forth from what is known as “Baptism in the Holy Spirit.” Baptism in the Holy Spirit refers to prayer for a fuller release of the Holy Spirit. It leads to more fervent and effective Christian living and allows the grace of baptism and confirmation to operate more fully within us. As Leon Cardinal Suenens said, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit is the experiential manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit, given in the sacraments of Christian Initiation but hitherto unexperienced.”

“For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 1:5)

The main focus of the conference is to introduce young people to Jesus Christ and to get them active in their Catholic faith. Often times God chooses to pour out His Spirit on the conferences in very powerful manifestations. The main way we see this manifestation is through the expressive praise and worship as described earlier.

Expressive praise is a response to God’s power, majesty, and love by way of the Holy Spirit who intercedes for us in our weakness. (Rom. 8:26)

SPIRITUAL MANIFESTATIONS

It is important to emphasize that both Scripture and Church teaching support manifestations of the Holy Spirit. It is not unorthodox, it's simply a stirring up of the gift of the Holy Spirit we all received in the Sacraments of Initiation. During the conference often God will anoint the Praise and Worship. He pours out the Holy Spirit in power. He gives peace and tears. He gives strength and encouragement. He gives the gift of tongues. All these things are given as gifts to those who will receive them. God does not force these things upon people. At all times we are free to accept or reject the gifts He wants to give. Adoration is also an anointed time for the conferences. When thousands of teens kneel before the God of the universe, He is there in power.

Emotions may come up at this time. It may be laughter or it may be tears. Sometimes the effect of the Spirit is overwhelming. Young people may experience resting in the Spirit during which they usually lie down. They may appear asleep but in most cases they are able to talk. You should direct prayer to any youth who is resting in the Spirit. This will help direct the youth to healing and a deeper faith.

In very rare cases there are negative spiritual manifestations. Sometimes youth will claim they are possessed when confronted with the Gospel. This is simply a way to shift the blame on an external force and not have to take responsibility for their lives or actions. Sometimes emotions that are intense can be mistaken for a demonic presence. If you have doubts, call upon a priest or special ministers—those volunteers on the conference staff who have received special training—to assist you.

For some people, these actions of the Holy Spirit may seem foreign or unorthodox. However, expressive praise and worship and other manifestations are a genuine work of the Holy Spirit supported by Sacred Scripture and Church teaching. Allow your heart and mind to be open to the Holy Spirit's work.

EUCCHARISTIC ADORATION

We are living in grace-filled times. Even as we witness the painful purification of our Church and weather attack after attack by forces opposed to the Church, God cannot be stopped. Across this country we are witnessing the renewal of Eucharistic Adoration and lives are being changed. It is a simple, yet profoundly powerful devotion.

“Because Christ himself is present in the sacrament of the altar, he is to be honored with the worship of adoration. To visit the Blessed Sacrament is . . . a proof of gratitude, an expression of love, and a duty of adoration toward Christ our Lord.” CCC 1418

Wherever Jesus is adored in the Blessed Sacrament, there is spiritual growth. Yet many Catholics are simply ignorant of the tremendous blessings poured out through this form of prayer. During the weekend, we invite the young people to enter into Eucharistic Adoration, to put themselves into the presence of Christ. For many of the youth, despite regular reception of the Eucharist, this is their first “breakthrough” encounter with Christ. Our priests and hosts do all they can from a pastoral perspective to prepare the young people. Helping them in that moment of encounter also falls upon you and your adult chaperones' shoulders.

Adoration is Christ-centered, not youth centered. You should not allow an overly emotional display from any of your youth to distract others from Christ. If this happens, you should remove the youth from the main room until they are back under control. You should also avoid group hugs and other displays that are not focusing on Jesus. There is plenty of time after the Holy Hour for group bonding. Please assist in making the Adoration as reverent and Christ-centered as possible.

TIP:

Setting a reverent example, participating in praise and worship, being attentive to particular prayer needs within your group, will all help to ensure the best experience on during Adoration.

Another powerful aspect we incorporate into the weekend is giving leaders time to pray with their young people. Taking the time and effort to bring youth into the presence of God is a very powerful and moving experience. There is also no way to downplay the power of your prayer with them during this time. As Catholics we are more comfortable with traditional group prayer. Spontaneous one-on-one prayer can be intimidating. To help prepare your adults for this powerful ministry, we have included a page outlining praying with youth. Be sure to review this page at one of your training sessions.

EMOTIONAL ISSUES DURING THE CONFERENCE

DEALING WITH EMOTIONAL TEENS

Emotions can be a powerful force for good or bad. It's important to understand what emotions are and how to deal with them. While most youth would report that they are generally happy, over 50 percent will have experienced a major depressive episode before they graduate from college. Many cases are chemically based, others are simply the result of years of emotional distress. The world is a stressful place for teens. Many youth are constantly in an elevated or depressed emotional state. We need to be prepared to embrace these young people in a loving, accepting way.

When God is working in their lives, teens are willing to be more open about their hurts and emotions. Sometimes things they haven't confronted in years come to the surface in a powerful emotional release.

Helping young people learn to master their emotions and put them in perspective is a challenge we must not be afraid to take on. Emotional release can be very good for young people, but we want to be sure that it is the Holy Spirit that leads them and not just emotion. If you see a young person using emotions to manipulate others and gain attention, deal directly with that youth. There is no need to let an overly emotional youth monopolize your group's time and attention. As powerful as emotions are, the power of the intellect and the will are much more powerful. Most young people have not been trained to master their emotions. Many others simply have weak wills and need grace. Many youth are falsely led to believe that emotions need to be allowed to run freely. Christ encourages us to be controlled by the Spirit, not emotions.

TIP:

If during Eucharistic Adoration a young person becomes a distraction, it is wise to have an adult team member take him or her outside of the main room for prayer. Inviting the Holy Spirit into the situation will bring the peace and knowledge necessary to effectively deal with the present need.

DEALING WITH TROUBLED TEENS

Sometimes powerful emotions are a result of a painful or sinful experience in the young person's past. If a situation comes up such as a suicidal or pregnant teen, it is probably best dealt with after the weekend, possibly with professional assistance. Spiritual battle is real. Jesus wants to give young people full lives. Satan wants to steal, kill, and destroy. If a young person is under spiritual attack and verbalizing self-destructive thoughts, you will want to bring special ministers into the situation. Together you can pray and decide the best course of action. Remember that we are there to evangelize. Try to avoid extended counseling. It is distracting to the others and monopolizes the adult's time.

If someone expresses suicidal thoughts, do not leave them alone. You want to be sure someone is there to talk them through any emotionally-charged episodes they might have.

TIP:

We have three very important tools to help deal with these issues

1. **Prayer.** We have the God of the Universe on our side. He loves the youth and cares for them more deeply than we ever could. Do not ever underestimate the value of interceding on behalf of teens.
2. **Special Ministers:** Each conference has a special ministry team that is there to pray and assist you in your pastoral care of the youth.
3. **Outside help:** You can help the young person by getting them into long-term, professional care. It is always important to remember that you are not the Savior. We shouldn't feel like we have to solve every problem. Use all the resources at your disposal.

PHYSICAL NEEDS DURING THE YOUTH CONFERENCE

An important part of a successful conference experience is making sure the youth are in good health during the weekend. Youth believe they are invincible and will often neglect their own needs for food and sleep. This can be very problematic during a conference weekend. Your adult team needs to be observant of your youth and aggressive in making sure they are taking care of themselves. This includes:

- Drinking plenty of water.
- Avoiding caffeine and high sugar sodas
- Getting at least six hours of sleep
- Eating regular meals. (No living on junk food and no fasting during the weekend.)
- Drinking more water than usual.

When teens are tired, dehydrated, or on a sugar/caffeine high, their emotional state can become agitated or skewed. Understanding the emotional impact this weekend has on young people, we do not want to confuse or constrain God's ability to work in their lives by allowing them to lose control. It is definitely for their benefit and yours that we keep them as balanced as possible.

Be sure to understand the climate at the conference site and prepare accordingly. Young people will dehydrate more quickly at some of our Southern conferences. Be aware of any medical conditions your teens may have, especially diabetes, epilepsy, or heart conditions. Make sure all youth are taking their prescribed medications.

A first aid station will be staffed with nurses and emergency medical technicians at each conference for treatment of routine injuries or conditions. If emergency services are necessary, an adult chaperone will have to travel with the teen to the hospital for support and to notify the parents/ legal guardian of the situation.

TIP:

It is always a good idea to keep a first aid kit handy while traveling to and from the conferences. You should also have a copy of everyone's release forms in a notebook with you throughout the weekend. In case of an emergency, you'll want ready access to this information.

SECTION 3: YOUTH CONFERENCE FOLLOW-UP

YOUR EFFORTS AND GOD'S GRACE

Your young people came to the conference just as you prayed they would. They encountered Christ in a powerful way just like you prayed they would. They are on fire for God and want to go deeper just like you prayed they would be. God did His job. Now it is time for you to do yours. That job is good follow-up.

Follow-up to your conference experience should begin as soon as you leave the parking lot. As stated earlier in this manual, Satan will not give up trying to ruin teens' lives once they have found Christ. In fact, he often attacks in more powerful and subtle ways at this time. He desires their spiritual death and will work overtime to steal the seed of faith that God has planted. Leaving them to find their way on their own can set them up for defeat.

What should your follow-up plan include? There are many different "programs" you could implement that could help strengthen your teens' faith walk. Many are very important and fruitful. But the most important aspect to focus on is personal relationships. Nothing can substitute personal mentoring, personal attention, and personal acts of love and kindness. We need to be Christ's hands, feet, and voice for the young people we serve.

THE TRIP HOME

There are a number of things you can do for your youth even on the ride home. It is a great time to continue building community and helping the youth process the weekend. Use the time wisely. Here are some suggestions:

1. **Testimony of Faith:** Have each youth prepare a testimony about what happened in their lives during the conference. Ask them to explain it as if the audience has no idea whom Jesus is and what a youth conference is. Have your chaperones ready to assist them. Provide paper and pencils. Have them share what they wrote with the rest of the group. This will help train them in sharing their faith.
2. **Ask Questions:** Develop a survey they can fill out. Ask questions about the conference. Include a section where youth can indicate what kind of follow-up they would like to participate in. Ask what topics they would be interested in learning more about. Ask for volunteers to help organize follow-up.
3. **Don't Forget Small Groups:** Meet in small groups to continue with any unfinished business or ministry from the weekend.
4. **Can You Hear the Music?** Have someone play songs from the weekend on guitar and have them sing along. This will help reinforce the weekend and show them that they do not have to be at the conference to really praise God.
5. **Game time!** Have games and fun things to do that will help the youth bond and relax.
6. **There's Always Naptime:** Most importantly, be willing to throw out any plans you might have if you sense your group needs something different, like sleep.

FANNING THE FLAMES

It is important to remember that although most young people have an incredible experience of God's love and grace at the conferences, what many have spiritually is a seed or a very small flame of faith. In terms of their spiritual development, many are still infants. They need guidance and support. The flame needs to be fueled and fanned, or a young person's faith can easily die of neglect.

What fuels will keep their souls ignited with the Holy Spirit?

- **Prayer:** Prayer is the key to everyone's spiritual life. Simply put: no time for prayer means no time for Christ. Teaching a young person to pray is the greatest gift you can give them. *One tried and true method for prayer is based upon the word ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Spending a few moments on each component will quickly develop into a strong prayer time.* There can be no overstating the power of a devotion to the Blessed Mother. Her life of grace is freely shared with us and she always leads us to Jesus. Prayer has to be taught as mandatory to our lives, not as an accessory to Jesus. Prayer is the steak, not the sizzle.
- **The Good News:** Teaching a young person how to read and study the Bible is another great way to fan the flames of faith. The Word of God, Jesus, dwells in the words of Scripture - so much that St. Jerome declared that ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ. With a heart of faith, young people will be changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. They will hear His voice. There are many great resources to help young people learn more about the Scripture.
- **I've Got Friends!** It's no secret that youth crave friendship and acceptance. Forming share groups is another great way to help them grow. Each youth has a need to bond with others. Once they find Christ, they need to share their faith with their peers. Providing a safe place for young people to meet and be themselves is a great way to help them to let go of fears and phoniness so they can become the people God wants them to be. Share groups can meet every week, every other week, or once a month. Make sure there is an adult facilitator to help keep the gathering focused.
- **A Time to Serve:** Service projects help young people grow closer to Christ. By giving of themselves and serving Christ in others, they will deepen their understanding of dying to self. It is important to process service projects so that young people take the lessons they learn to heart.

STARTING A EUCHARISTIC PRAYER GROUP

It should go without saying that young people need the Eucharist. Regularly attending Mass and receiving Jesus should be the highpoint of every person's faith journey. As stated earlier, an increased Eucharistic devotion is sweeping America. Young Catholics are rediscovering this and lives are being transformed. There is no denying the power of being in the presence of Christ. It changes us. It opens our hearts. It fills us with grace. Unfortunately, many parishes do not have scheduled times for Eucharistic Adoration. Do not let this discourage you. Have your youth put together a group of committed students and approach your pastor with the desire to start a regular Adoration time. Develop a Holy Hour format and prepare a handout on Scripture and Church documents that focuses on the Eucharist.

RESOURCES FOR YOUTH AND YOUTH LEADERS

There are literally hundreds of outlets for good youth ministry materials that equip and train both youth and adults, far too many to list here. We have included a list of web sites that are both resources and springboards for further information.

www.franciscanyouth.com – The official web site of our summer conferences. You will find schedules, links, and other information, including the Young Apostles program. Various resources, FAQ, photos from past conferences and more!

www.lifeteen.com – The official web site of the Life Teen. Loaded with valuable resources and information on how to bring Life Teen to your parish. Plus great stuff for teens!

www.thesource4ym.com – An excellent site that contains, games, ice breakers, and discussion starters.

www.ymcentral.com – Great Catholic site with resources for both high school and junior high.

www.youthministry.com – Web site for Group Magazine. Books, videos, and other youth ministry resources.

www.youthspecialties.com – Excellent site. Tons of links and resources.

www.screenit.com – Web site offering detailed ratings on movie content. Find out about a movie before you see it or take teens to it.

www.cpyu.org – Excellent site with tons of information to help adults understand the world of teens. Clear, relevant, and in-your-face reporting about the challenges and trends in youth culture.

THE BASIC GOSPEL MESSAGE

If someone asked you to share your faith with him or her what would you say? How would you condense all the beliefs of the Church into a message that most people could understand? The Catholic faith is multi-faceted and deep. Some teachings are hard to grasp. Fortunately, the basics of the Gospel of Christ are not. The following is a simple outline that anyone can use to share his or her faith.

There are three basic things that faith teaches us.

- Who God is?
- Who we are?
- How He relates to us and us to Him.
 1. God is love and the Creator of all.
 2. We are created in His image and He has a plan for us.
 3. Through sin, humanity has become disordered and separated from God and slaves to sin.
 4. Through the death of His Son, Jesus, God has redeemed the world and set us free.
 5. God wants to free each one of us from our sins.
 6. God is calling everyone to a life-giving relationship with Himself—a complete, eternal union
 7. We can accept, in faith, the gift of His grace and love. We were made for this. We are always free to choose or reject this gift.
 8. Through prayer, Sacraments, and Scripture God conforms our minds and wills to Christ, our Master and King.

Most of the young people who come to the conferences are Baptized Catholics. This means they already possess the gift of the Holy Spirit and His sanctifying grace. Many, however, are steeped in sin and need to repent and receive Sacramental reconciliation in order to move forward in their faith journey. The process of evangelizing these teens is to make them aware of the purpose of their lives that might turn to Christ and release the gift that is in their hearts. They have access to all they need to follow Christ and partake in heaven if only they take the necessary action. A story that you can use with teens to help illustrate this concept is:

During the Great Depression, a wealthy cattle rancher, like most other people, started to lose money. After a few major setbacks, the rancher began selling off huge parcels of his land to take care of his herd. As the hard times progressed, he began selling off his cattle to support his family. Finally, saddled with debt and with no cattle left, he sat alone and depressed in his home on his last five hundred acres. In the midst of his desperation, he was visited by a group of students from the local university who asked his permission to do testing on his property. Their theory, based on previous tests, was that there were huge oil reserves in the region. Initial testing confirmed the presence of oil on the man's property. A well was drilled and it was a gusher. Overnight, the man became much wealthier than he had ever been as a rancher. Little did he know that during his hardest times he had always been rich beyond words. He simply wasn't aware of the tremendous supply of oil buried beneath his home. It had always been his – all he needed to do was to sink a well and access it. How many of us live as a poor man when we are rich in Christ!

In the same way, many young Catholics are living in spiritual poverty. They are not aware of God's love, His plan for their lives, or the awesome power of the Holy Spirit. Yet, all they need to do is drill down into the person of Christ and access it all. By giving themselves to Christ in faith, they can experience renewal and transformation. They can experience forgiveness and freedom. We need to point young people towards Christ.

We need not be afraid of the challenge the Gospel presents. Committing your life to Christ will demand sacrifice, courage, rejection of sin, and picking up your cross and following Him. If we do not present the whole picture we are not truly presenting the gospel. We are only giving half the story.

There is no underestimating the need for us to be able to clearly communicate the truths of God. We do not need to be theologians or world-class evangelists. We do need to be able to speak the truth of God's love and His plan for our lives to those around us. The first step is to firmly root your own life in Christ. You cannot share what you do not have. We are called into a vibrant, active relationship with Christ through prayer, the Sacraments, and the Church. Without this relationship at the center of our lives, our religious practice is hollow. When we first live the faith before young people we will earn the right to preach to them.

EFFECTIVE SMALL GROUP LEADING

Small groups give young people the opportunity to process the experience of the youth conference. It is your responsibility to make this time the most beneficial for the youth. That will require good listening skills, some basic guidelines, compassion, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Basic Guidelines for Small Group Leaders

1. **PRAY, PRAY, and PRAY!** Start and end each small group with a prayer. Ask youth to lead this prayer.
2. **Teens First:** Always start the discussion by asking the youth if they have any questions about what they just heard.
3. **What's in a name?** Learn everyone's name. It is very demoralizing to the youth if you do not make this effort.
4. **DO NOT PREACH!** This is the youth's opportunity to respond. Let them do the talking.
5. **Emotions are good!** Be accepting of tears and emotions. This is the only language some youth have to express their deep feelings.
6. **Non-verbal's:** Be very aware of your own eye contact level and body language. If you ask a question and then look like you could not care less about the answer, the youth will close up.
7. **Stand Your Ground:** Establish your authority in the first meeting and do not give up leadership of the group to a "dominant" personality.
8. **Keep It Simple:** Ask simple and clear questions. A few are included in the program book to help get you started.
9. **All Aboard!** Encourage everyone to participate.
10. **Shhh!** Take advantage of silence. 10 seconds of silence can seem like 10 minutes when you are the leader but often times youth need time to think. Don't jump in and try to fill an "uncomfortable" silence. Sometimes youth need to feel uncomfortable.
11. **Be Honest:** Deal with difficult questions honestly. Don't make up answers. If you don't have an answer, tell them you will help them find one.
12. **Chatty Cathy:** Do not allow one person to monopolize the time. Most "talkative" small group members do not mean to offend, but they can at times be inappropriate. Talk with the person outside of the group and ask for their cooperation in letting everyone have a chance to share.
13. **Love the Outsiders:** Be accepting of the cold, closed off, and rebellious youth. Sometimes only the love and attention of others can break down some walls.
14. **Don't Give Up:** Do not be discouraged. Some groups are very tough.
15. **Be flexible.** Let God lead you. Expect great things. God is good.

Basic Guidelines for Small Group Members

1. **Be Honest and Open:** If you put nothing in, you'll get nothing out.
2. **NO NEGATIVE HUMOR:** If it isn't true and up-building, do not say it.
3. **No one HAS to share:** You can pass on any question you want.
4. **Keep it to yourself!** The contents of the small group belong only to the participants. You cannot break the privacy or confidentiality of another member.

Things to Do During Your First Small Group

1. Pray.
2. Learn names if you don't already know them.
3. Explain the purpose of small group time.
4. Let the students know that you love and support them.
5. Establish group guidelines.
6. Invite the youth to be themselves.

Remember, you are there as a guide. Small group is an adventure and you're leading the safari. You also need to keep the youth focused. Don't let them waste time. Jesus knew the power of small group. He only chose twelve apostles and often took only Peter, James, and John with Him to special times in His ministry (the Transfiguration and the Garden of Gethsemane). If you pray, follow these simple guidelines, and let the Spirit lead you, you will be a part of some of the best ministry that takes place all weekend.

HOW TO PRAY WITH TEENS

Nothing is more powerful than prayer. Through our prayer we can move mountains, we can move the very heart of God. Perhaps this is why prayer can seem so intimidating. This can be especially true when we are praying for and with teens. Keep in mind that God **wants** you to pray for and with one another. Intercessory prayer literally means “standing in the gap.” When you pray with your teens, you are going with them into the very presence of God and asking Him to bless them.

You will have many opportunities throughout the conference weekend to pray with the teens. How do you initiate prayer? First, you should prepare the students for the experience before the weekend. You should take time to pray with each teen during conference prep meetings. Give them something to reflect upon such as, “What do you want God to do in your life during the conference?” Let them take time to reflect on the question. Then pray with each person. Follow these simple steps:

1. **Ask first:** If the teen has never been prayed with before, take time to ask them how they are doing and assure them that you care for them. Some appropriate questions might be:
 - How are you feeling?
 - Have you ever done anything like this before? (If yes, what was it like?)
 - Do you have any questions?
2. **Hands On:** If they are ready to begin, simply put your hand on the person’s shoulder and ask the Holy Spirit to come and bless this time. The “laying on of hands” is a Biblical directive for prayer (see Mark 10:16, 2 Tim 1:6-7, Acts 8:18, 9:17-18). An example might be, “Father, we come before you now. I lift up ____ to you. Please pour out Your Holy Spirit on us as we come before you.”
3. **Shhh...** Take some time to sit in silence before the Lord and let the Holy Spirit do His work.
4. **What Do They Want or Need:** Ask the person you are praying over what they want to get out of the conference. You might be led to ask other clarifying questions or even probing questions to get beneath the surface of their answers. Your goal is simply to be able to pray in the best possible way for the young person you are with. For example, if they say something like, “I want to grow closer to God,” you might ask, “What do you think is holding you back from knowing God right now?” A question like that might reveal the need to pray for deeper faith or strength to turn from sin. Once you have a clear direction you can begin interceding. You might start with, “Lord, we just continue to come before you. I lift up ____ and their desire to grow closer to you. I ask that you give them deeper faith and the strength to resist those things that take him/her away from you.”
5. **Shhh... (again):** Allow more silent time for the Lord to work. (You can be praying silently for the person repeating, “Come Holy Spirit” in the silence of your own heart.
6. **Thoughts of the Teen:** Ask the person you are praying with if God is saying anything to them or showing them anything. Ask them if there is anything else they would like to pray for. If there is, intercede for those particular intentions.
7. **They can Pray, too:** Encourage the youth to say a prayer asking God to help them grow closer to Him.
8. **Old Faithful:** Close the prayer time with an Our Father or a Hail Mary.

This is one simple method of praying over another person. You can adapt this in any way that you need to. The important thing to remember is that God does the work in hearts. We cannot, on our own, work miracles, change hearts, or forgive sins. It’s all about God. Avoid counseling during prayer. Keep the focus on Jesus.

During the conference, any number of issues may come up that will need to be prayed through: divorce, family problems, addictions, sexual issues, abuse, neglect, broken hearts, serious sins, death, grief, depression, suicide, self-mutilation, just to name a few. Be prepared just to accept the youth and pray through these issues if they come up. Be confident that nothing will come up that God won’t give you the compassion, wisdom, and grace to deal with.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH TEENS (part 1)

God has wired each one of us to thrive when we are enjoying the love and acceptance of friends and comrades. Is it any wonder that fellowship and belonging are two of the deepest cries of the teen heart? When asked what qualities young people would want in their church and youth group, 73% answered a welcoming atmosphere where than can be themselves. This gives us the first very important clue as to how to build a strong relationship with teens—meeting teens where they are at and loving and accepting them for who they are.

Unfortunately, this can be extremely difficult. Teenagers can appear like alien entities. They have their own language, dress, culture, and media. We see their spiky hair, baggy clothes, tattoos, and piercings and we become intimidated, maybe even fearful. But we can't let that fear win. What we need to always remember is that God does not place much importance on outward appearance. What matters to Him is the heart and that is why we will win. No matter what the "surface" of a teen reveals or hides, their hearts were made by God, for God—and His perfect love is what they hunger for the most. Jesus could look beyond the surface and see the heart and we must too.

This applies to the actions of teens as well. It is easy to judge a teen's behaviors and believe that they are the most self-centered, disrespectful, and rude creatures on the planet. We see the reckless and often thoughtless ways they turn to sin, and can think that they are totally ignorant or corrupt. The reality of a teen's world is that every day sin is presented as normal and even healthy. They live in a world where God is removed from the public arena and His very existence is denied, and the last acceptable bigotry is anti-Catholicism. Most young people do not know Christ—many do not even know themselves. In the absence of the living God, young people will seek anything that will give their lives meaning and purpose. It doesn't matter if it is drugs, sex, or music—they'll use anything to fill the emptiness.

The way we bring Christ to these kids is through a relationship with them. We do not just tell them about God's love for them—we show them. When we are with the teens, they should see Jesus in us. This challenges us to make sure that at all times we are strong in our relationship with Christ—we cannot give what we do not have. It also should help us realize that if we are going to be effective ministers to youth, it is going to cost us. We need to come out of ourselves and really reach out to young people in love and patience.

How to Build a Relationship with Teenagers

1. **Are you Available?** Make yourself available. Relationships take time and there is no short-cut or quick fix.
2. **Don't be Pushy:** Do not push yourself on a teen. Do not try to engage in more than 5 or 10 minutes of conversation with a teen unless you both have planned on it.
3. **Learn names!** Learn names! Learn names!
4. **Actively listen:** Most of what is communicated will be done non-verbally.
5. **Time to Share:** Share about yourself. Young people need to know you are real.
6. **Establish trust:** This is challenging because most teens have been let down by adults at some point. For children of divorce, this mistrust runs deep. You will need to be aggressive with these students.
7. **Watch your Boundaries:** Maintain strong boundaries with teens. Often times young people can become confused over the nature of the relationship you are forming with them. Boundaries protect you and the young person.
8. **Be an adult:** Be a role model. Do not sacrifice your authority for the sake of being accepted by teens. They need to be accepted by you not the other way around. When you use negative humor, cursing, or simply try to be "like them" in order to fit in, you stop being a leader and become a clown. And most people love clowns but will not let themselves be led by one.
9. **Be Vocal:** Do not be afraid to verbalize love and care. Here are some phrases that you need to now:
 - I love you, no matter what.
 - I'm here for you.
 - I may not agree with all of your decisions, but I still love you, no matter what.
 - Even if you don't feel like talking about it, I want you to know I am praying for you, and I'll be ready to listen when you're ready to talk.
 - I trust you. I know you can make the right decision.
 - I will challenge you because I want the very best for you

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH TEENS (part 2)

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus asks 73 different questions to people that He came in contact with. Not once did he ask, "What's up?" or "How's it goin'?" These questions often keep communication on a generic, unfeeling level. They don't seek the heart of another or attempt to break beneath the surface. The art of asking good questions can really improve your skills in reaching young people.

Be prepared for the consequences of asking good questions. The most important is following the question with good active listening. Don't ask the question unless you are really prepared to hear the entire answer or you will end up doing more harm than good.

Be patient with the process of relationship building. It takes time, tact, discernment, and grace. The payoff of being able to mentor a young person is worth the effort.

The following is a list of questions that will assist you in breaking through with young people.

- How will you prepare yourself for (a test, confrontation, college, a job interview, test results, etc.)?
- When I refer to (fill in the blank), what do you think I mean?
- What do you mean when you say, "(fill in the blank)"?
- If you had it your way, what would you do in this situation?
- Whom are you listening to?
- Do you feel comfortable with your decision?
- How important is this to you?
- How important do you think this is to your parents? Friends? God?
- If you had an hour alone with God, how would you spend the time?
- If you heard someone else share what you just told me, how would you respond?
- Who has had a positive influence on you? Why? What did he or she do specifically?
- What character traits do you possess that make you a positive influence?
- How do those qualities help you in relating to others?
- Who has had a negative influence on you? Why? What did he or she do or not do specifically?
- What character traits sometimes turn others off to you?
- What are areas you want to improve on and how have they kept you from relating to others?
- How does someone earn trust with you?
- How have you earned someone else's trust?
- How's your God-time?
- It's obvious you're sincere about your Christianity; is Jesus real to you at this point in your life?
- At what point in your life did God become real to you?
- What is God leading you to do?
- Looking back (on a specific situation), would you say/do anything different?
- What do you want most right now?
- What's the worst-case scenario in this situation?
- If you were the other person, what would you do/say/think/feel?
- Have you talked with them (your mom/dad/boyfriend/friend) about it?
- Do you trust God with (fill in the blank)?
- What are you willing to change in order to bring change in yourself (or this situation/relationship)?
- After encouraging someone with advice on how to handle a certain situation, ask, "Is this fair advice?"
- In suggesting how to respond or handle a situation, ask, "Is this something you can see yourself saying/doing?" or "Do you feel like you can do this?"
- How did that affect the way you think of yourself? Feel about yourself?
- What choices are you making to remain pure in thought, in body, and in your heart?
- How can I help?