



# A Vision for Young Adult Ministry in the Archdiocese of Washington

## What is Young Adult Ministry?

Young Adult Ministry is the evangelizing outreach of the parish to invite, build peer community, and form young adult missionary disciples in their 20s and 30s, married and single, who are integrated into the life of the parish and sent on mission in the world.

### Young Adult Ministry is...

...**NOT youth ministry**. Young Adults are adults not teenagers.

...**NOT a group**. It is a diverse community and ministry outreach of peers, not a static program or group.

...**NOT a singles ministry**. Young adult ministry includes those who are single, dating, and married, with and without children. Young adults are seeking belonging, meaning and a healthy community of relationships. Only from that context can people discern their vocation and give a generous response to God’s call for their lives.

...**NOT a parallel parish**. Young adults are not only interested in spending time with peers. Young adults are open to being mentored and participating in an intergenerational community when they are personally invited, listened to, and treated as an adult with a perspective to offer.

County	Total Population	20-24	25-34	35-49 (35-39)	YA Total	YA % of Pop.	No. of YAs if 10% (20%) of population is Catholic
DC	601,723	64,110	124,745	119,198 (42,911)	231,766	39% (44% adj.)	23,176 (46,353)
Montgomery	971,777	54,031	132,393	218,387 (78,619)	265,043	27%	26,504 (53,008)
Prince George	863,420	70,644	125,740	190,132 (68,447)	264,831	31%	26,483 (52,966)
Charles	146,551	8,683	17,175	36,753 (13,231)	39,089	27%	3,908 (7,817)
St. Mary’s	105,151	7,228	13,356	23,792 (8,565)	29,149	28%	2,914 (5,829)
Calvert	88,737	4,832	8,734	21,455 (7,723)	21,289	24%	2,128 (4,257)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,777,359</b>	<b>209,528</b>	<b>422,143</b>	<b>(219,496)</b>	<b>851,167</b>	<b>30.6%</b>	<b>85,116 (170, 232)</b>

## 5 Steps to Evangelize Young Adults in your Parish

### 1. Empower young adults who are already active in their faith to become involved in parish and young adult leadership

Young adults who are already active in their faith are called to put their faith into action, including through leadership within their local parish. The presence of young adults in church leadership enriches the parish with diverse talents, gifts, perspective and energy. Seeing peers active in ministry serves as an important model for other young adults and a reminder of the importance of young adults to the larger community.

#### What Catholic Parishes Can Do:

- Personally invite young adults into all parish leadership roles.
- Empower young adults who are celebrating sacraments (marriage, baptism, through RCIA, etc.) to know that the experience of sacramental grace calls them to be sent on mission in the life of the parish and in the world.
- Ensure there are at least two young adults present on the parish/pastoral council (and that young adults are represented on other leadership teams in the community) and that more young adults serve in visible Sunday ministries.
- Advocate that all current parish leaders mentor a younger person within their ministry so that the wisdom and institutional memory of the community can be passed on and so that intergenerational relationships can



be formed.

## ***2. Personally invite and form friendships with young adults***

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Young adults are most likely to be evangelized through peer community, healthy relationships and friendships with people in a similar stage in life. At the heart of young adult ministry is a relationship with Jesus Christ lived out, and often first experienced, through friendship with a member of the Body of Christ, the Church. Providing initial connection and opportunities for friendship can take the form of a monthly social event, brunch/dinner, small groups, etc.

### ***What Catholic Parishes Can Do:***

- Begin by gathering the young adults who are currently involved in the parish and listening to their experiences of the church and how you can partner with them to invite their peers into parish life.
- Ensure that there are ongoing opportunities (e.g. small groups) to invite young adults to gather as a peer community
- Focus on people, not programs. Spend more time in the course of the week making phone calls, sending emails, and having in-person conversations than planning for programs or events.

## ***3. Accompany young adults into an encounter with Jesus Christ***

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*“Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction (Pope Benedict XVI). We take for granted two things: 1) that those who are already coming to Mass or parish programs have an active and attentive relationship with Jesus and that 2) people automatically recognize an encounter Jesus at Mass and at parish events. Often, people need to be invited into a transformative experience of faith and be given the space to reflect on that experience to more fully realize and be transformed by an encounter with the Lord. While Jesus is truly present at Mass and anytime two or more are gathered, it takes radical and consistent intentionality to ensure that ongoing programs and events do not get distracted from the mission of making Christ present.*

### ***What Catholic Parishes Can Do:***

- Focus on the ‘Sunday Experience’ at your parish, especially hospitality, ensuring that Sunday is an opportunity to encounter Jesus in beauty, prayer, and friendship.
- Provide opportunities for reflection and discussion at service and formation events
- Provide opportunities for Mass, Confession, Adoration, and communal prayer
- Start a small group and personally invite others to join
- Review existing programs and events and discuss how the event can more clearly help people experience the radical love of the Lord.

## ***4. Send out young adults as missionary disciples in the larger community***

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At the heart of the Gospel message is the missionary mandate of Jesus to “go make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28;19). Young adults are not flooding into our pews. We are in a period of the church where we can’t stay inside the church. All of the laity must be sent out to meet people where they are. Are parish ministries going out in the community or are they waiting for an entire generation of people to come to them?

### ***What Catholic Parishes Can Do:***

- Ensure that every parish leader, from lectors to food pantry workers, go through some form of basic evangelization training and recognize that they are a part of the evangelizing ministry of the parish, authentically witnessing their faith and inviting others to encounter and live in relationship with Jesus Christ.

- Be present at community civic events where young adults gather, like festivals, block parties, concerts, etc.
- Literally take parish life outside the church by hosting a blessing of the animals, processions, holding a social event off-site and invite the larger community, etc.
- Initiate and participate in ecumenical and interfaith programs and events with the community.

### 5. Become increasingly young-adult-responsive as a parish family

The organization, budget, and structure of parish life communicate parish values and are often built to respond to children and older adults. Young adult questions and challenges such as coping with discernment, isolation, and frequent transition are not often addressed in the life of most parishes. This leads many young adults to conclude that they do not belong or that the Catholic faith is irrelevant. The intergenerational parish family has a lot to offer in response to these questions and challenges. Parishes must be proactive to invite young adults into the parish family, create a sense of belonging, and empower the perspectives and questions of young adults. (e.g. evening masses, welcoming ministries, ongoing social community events, process for discerning parishioner gifts, blessings of engaged/married couples or those who are moving away, evangelization small groups, mentoring opportunities, etc.).

#### **What Catholic Parishes Can Do:**

- Assess the lifestyle, patterns, and needs of young adults in the geographical community around the parish and how young adults are and could potentially become more involved in the Church or how the parish could do things differently to engage and support young adults.
- Reserve leadership roles for young adults and ensure that their generational perspective is involved in decision making.
- Invest in the places where young adults are currently engaged in the parish (RCIA, marriage prep, baptism prep, liturgical ministries, etc.) and ensure that these become moments for mentoring and to build relationships/friendships to promote the enduring practice of faith.

### **What are Young Adults Looking For in a Church Today?**

1. Community and Belonging (a faith community where everybody knows your name)
2. Dynamic Liturgies
3. Spiritual Growth and Enrichment
4. Religious education and Catholic identity
5. Guidance and direction in life
6. Acceptance and support
7. Opportunities for service and leadership
8. Social activities
9. A community that shares common values
10. Inspiration and rejuvenation

(From *Connecting Young Adults to Catholic Parishes*)

### **Key Quotes about Ministering with Young Adults**

“Until they have a good experience, it is difficult to attract young adults to prayer-driven events”  
(*The Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry*, 18)

“Young adult groups can attract an inordinate number of needy people...you cannot begin with this group. Only after a strong, healthy core group of young adults is established will you be able to support those with greater needs” (*The Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry*, 19)

“The best method for integrating young adults into parish life is direct personal invitation. We call this the *Jesus Method of Organizing*” (*The Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry*, 28)



“Young adults cannot usually give you the same type of commitment that older adults can. Their personal, school, and work schedules are busy and constantly changing. A more effective way to reach people and obtain their support for a specific task is to ask for commitment of a defined short period of time” (*The Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry*, 30)

“Not every parish has the population, resources, or personnel needed to do comprehensive ministry with young adults. But every parish can be more responsive to the needs and gifts that young adults bring” (2)

“Faith communities that understand young adults form relationships with them before extending an invitation to attend programs” (*Connecting Young Adults to Catholic Parishes*, 6)

## How Can Young Adult Ministry Strengthen Your Parish?

**1. Young Adult Ministry grows a parish by reaching out to the majority of its neighbors.** The Millennial Generation makes up the most diverse and largest generation in American history, 25% of the entire population. In the Archdiocese of Washington, the percentage is even higher, 28% in Maryland and 44% in DC.

**2. Young Adult Ministry infuses parish life with energy, unique gifts, and fresh, diverse perspectives.** The DC area attracts the nation’s brightest, and most altruistic young leaders. Parishes that recognize this, create space for, and mentor young adult leadership reap the rewards. Parishes that don’t can become unhealthy and stagnant, surviving without the gifts and energy of an entire generation.

**3. Young Adult Ministry prioritizes encountering Jesus and forming lay people for mission.** Young Adults are branded as “spiritual but not religious”, yet this label describes more about what they value than what they lack. Young adults are a captive audience for a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ and will re-engage when they find in their parish a powerful encounter with Jesus, equipment to live their lay mission in the world, and a community to accompany them.

**4. Young Adult Ministry reverses the steep decline in faith practice.** Young adults are the least religious generation in U.S. history. Our Church has a historic opportunity and responsibility to evangelize an increasingly non-affiliated generation. Intentional ministry with young adults can reverse the steep decline of religious practice, sacramental marriages, baptisms, religious vocations by helping young adults discern their mission in the world as lifelong Catholics.

**5. Young Adult Ministry mentors leaders for today and in the future.** Young adult ministry mentors the current and emerging generation of parish leaders. It is essential we pass along institutional memory and tradition from generation to generation. How will this be possible if parishes do not increase outreach, investment, and new leadership today?

## How can the Office of Young Adult Ministry Support Your Parish?

- Facilitate a listening session with young adults in the parish
- Present ‘How a Parish can Engage and Support Young Adults’ to a parish staff or Parish Council
- Assist a parish in putting together an Outreach Plan for young adults
- Provide formation resources and opportunities for parish leaders and young adults leaders
- Assess the effectiveness of established young adult ministries with the young adult leadership

*\*For more information on starting and sustaining a young adult community or becoming a more young-adult-responsive parish please contact Jonathan Lewis, Director of Evangelization, Youth, and Young Adult Initiatives at the Archdiocese of Washington at [DCCatholic@adw.org](mailto:DCCatholic@adw.org) or call 301-853-4559.*

