



TO: Pastors and Youth Ministers

FROM: Secretariat for Parish Life and Development, Youth and Young Adult Ministry

SUBJECT: Guidelines and Reflections for Youth Ministry in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

DATE: May 27, 2020

Youth ministry programs often thrive in the summer. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, we are at a new place and in a new time that few could have predicted just a few months ago. A new way of being together is required, while staying focused on the mission of the Gospel and serving the young people and families entrusted to our care.

Therefore, we are limiting events and gatherings to slow the spread of the disease and to keep our young people and families safe. We must all continue to change and grow in order to do effective youth ministry in this new environment for the foreseeable future.

In addition to the guidelines already issued by the [diocese](#), the following guidelines are specifically offered for high school and junior high parish youth ministry programs. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us with any questions or concerns.

- Postpone larger gatherings (10+ people according to state guidelines) and/or consider alternative ministry approaches that place safety first for teens/families.
- Retreats, conferences, service immersion experiences, large group leadership experiences, and amusement park trips are NOT permitted to take place.
- Taking young people on a bus or group trip in or out of state is NOT permitted.
- The State of Ohio and the diocese continue to update guidelines regarding school building usage and safety. Youth ministry programs must follow the facility protocols as determined by the diocese.
- Regularly check for updates on the [diocesan](#) website, your county health department website, the [CDC](#), and the [Ohio Department of Health](#) websites.
- Continue to pray for all those affected by this pandemic. Pope Francis composed a special [Prayer to Mary](#) for this very purpose.

What should Youth Ministers be doing?

- Follow the letter and spirit of state and diocesan guidelines for individuals and groups.
- Work closely with your pastor and staff to follow best safety practices. Take small, incremental steps to reopen ministry. Assist staff and others with technology expertise if you have those talents.
- All liturgies, including youth liturgies, must follow diocesan [worship guidelines](#). This includes requirements for cleaning and sanitizing before / after each Mass, practicing social distancing, and wearing face masks. While music is an integral part of our worship experience, please note that “congregational singing and choral singing at public liturgies is strongly discouraged at this time. Church choir rehearsals should NOT take place until further notice.”
- Please [share your ideas](#). We want to hear about the creative things that you are doing during this time to meet the needs of young people and families. We will share these to strengthen youth ministry to and with young people and families throughout the diocese.

- As you look towards the future of youth ministry in your parish, we strongly encourage shifting to a small communities model for the upcoming year. We are developing guidelines, tips, and resources to support you during this transition.

We understand that this is a difficult time for everyone. Please know that your ministry is very much appreciated during this time. We will continue to re-evaluate and update these guidelines as needed.

I offer one additional question for your prayerful consideration:

“How do we live in the midst of a pandemic in a way that experiences the kingdom of God with our people and brings the hope and Good News of Jesus Christ into the world?”

This question belongs to the entire Christian community. It may be tempting to think that finding the answer is the Pastor’s job, the Bishop’s job, or that of the trained professional staff who bring many their talents, faith, and much dedication to fulfilling the mission of the Church.

Yet it is *OUR* question. If we believe that God works in and through all things, how and in what ways is God working through this pandemic in our individual lives? In our Christian community?

May we take these questions to prayer and ponder them in our hearts, using our blessed Mother Mary who has done the same and shown us the way to reflect, contemplate, and faithfully respond to go wherever God called her. May we have the courage to do the same.

The late Peter Gomes, offered this reflection on the hope in Jesus Christ that we share.

“When we say, as often we do, that hope triumphs over experience that is precisely what we mean. Left alone to a life of experience, where we deal with nothing but the facts, where we are content to address only the tangible, the material, the really real, the mundane, we are doomed to the accumulation, the sum total, of that experience. Experience tells us only where we have been, like driving the car by the light of the rearview mirror. There can be no ultimate satisfaction in the accumulation of that experience.

Christian hope is meant to guide you into the place where you have not yet been, and into becoming the person that you have not yet become. That is the radical dimension of the Christian faith, and it is not content with the notion of Christianity celebrating the things that are or, worse still, of Christianity celebrating things as we imagine them once to have been.

Hope is not an act of will so much as it is an act of imagination and courage. Hope and imagination are required because it deals with what has not yet happened. Hope allows us to see beyond what is and to imagine, to see with our inner eye, what might and what ought to be. Christian hope is meant to guide you into the place where you have not yet been, and into becoming the person you have not yet become. Christian faith is prophetic, speaking of the time to come, of things that are not yet, of places we have not yet been to, of people we have not yet become.”

Peter Gomes, [Strength for the Journey](#)

If you have any questions, please contact Dobie Moser at dmoser@dioceseofcleveland.org.