

Starting a Catholic Club at a Public High School

As a Director of Youth Ministry (DYM), we understand the importance of reaching young people where they are at in their day-to-day lives. We also know the need to support Catholic youth in their high school environment. In a public high school context – this may present some challenges. Youth often have an array of student clubs available to them in a public high school. Below are some tips and things to consider for assisting youth in creating a Catholic club at their public high school.

This resource has been created with guidelines drawn primarily from Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) but the items below will generally be applicable in all school settings. Be sure to check with your local jurisdiction for their standards. Individual high schools may have their own guidelines as well.

1. Identify Youth Leadership and Interest

Student leadership and interest is needed. This may be a young person who has come to you and expressed that they are starting a Catholic club or you might identify leaders in your youth program whom you think would be a good fit. Bear in mind that student clubs need to start from student interest and not any outside influence – so navigate this topic appropriately and delicately as needed! Often, mentioning the idea among your youth will get some interest quickly – and then from there discern which leaders would be best.

A list of student interest names will be needed. At Marshall High School, for example, 25 signatures of interested students are necessary to start a club.

2. Secure a School Employee as Sponsor

An approved school employee is needed for a student club. Students could go to their school leadership and let them know they're interested in starting the club and ask if they have anyone in mind who could serve as the sponsor.

Students can look for tips and clues to identify a Catholic teacher or administrator: do they have a mug/lanyard/sweatshirt or some other accessory from a Catholic university? Perhaps they went to school there... or at least that could be the conversation starter. However, the sponsor does not need to be Catholic. They only need to support the students in what they are doing. The sponsor will be able to work with school administration on making sure rules and guidelines are followed.

3. Purpose of the Club

What kind of things would the club do? There are many possibilities. The club could meet weekly to discuss the Scripture readings for the upcoming Sunday Mass, do a Bible study, or other catechetical program. The club might bring in speakers.

A popular idea which would also be well-received in many secular environments is to have social works and services as the purpose of the club. Doing what we would call works of mercy in a Catholic context would generally be welcome in a public school setting and many youth have a desire for social service. Collecting baby items (diapers, clothing, baby bottles, etc.) and packing bags for a crisis pregnancy center or contributing to a food drive are possibilities.

It is important to bear in mind that all students are welcome to come to club meetings, as the club is not exclusive nor are the meetings a closed event.

4. Financing and Fundraising Concerns

In general, the aims of the club should not require many (or any) expenses. According to FCPS guidelines, clubs may not be based on fundraising. Although, fundraising may be the result of a club need. If funds are needed, financing is to be the responsibility of the members of the club. It is important to note that no outside organization is meant to have an influence on the club. It is advised that the club not interact with the parish in raising funds.

5. Benefits for Your Parish Program

Make use of the club to promote your parish program. Work with your student leaders who are in the club to spread the word about various youth grouping events and opportunities at the parish. Carefully navigating this in accord with school policy on clubs, of course! For example, you would not want to simply create a flyer and ask a student to hand it out at the club. Share info with student leaders and suggest to them to make the flyer or share the info in another suitable way. Get creative with how you could utilize the club to invite teens to your parish or Diocesan events!

Below are steps to starting a club from a DYM who had success in assisting a teen at Washington & Liberty High School in Arlington.

1) Find a student or students who you know would want to start a club at their school. Ask your teens to see if they already lead a club.

- 2) Build a relationship with that teen/s and parents.
- 3) Invite them to coffee or lunch to share your vision and come prepared with ideas and a very clear vision.
- 4) Let the teen think and pray on it.
- 5) Once the teen agrees to lead remind them that you are there to support and plan any service projects to the best of your ability.
- 6) Let the teen be creative and make it their own vision since they are the ones leading the club.
- 7) Find a teacher... this is the hard part. Ask the teen if they have a good relationship with any of the teachers or do they have a favorite teacher they could ask?
- 8) Once the teen has asked a teacher and they agree - start planning. Encourage the teen to submit all needed paper to the school to approve the club.
- 9) Set a meeting time with the teacher and let them know you are here to support the club and the teens.
- 10) I filled out a volunteer form through the office so they know who I am.
- 11) Help the teen with flyers, meeting dates, and finding projects.
- 12) And then launch! and remember it is the teen's club and the teacher who is the advisor and you are the support.

Catholic Athletes for Christ

There may be interest among student athletes in your parish to start a chapter of *Catholic Athletes for Christ* (CAC). CAC is an organization that supports Catholic athletes and seeks to share the Gospel in and through athletics. Click on the following link for more info on Catholic Athletes for Christ: <http://www.catholicathletesforchrist.org/> and click here for info on starting a chapter for CAC: <http://www.catholicathletesforchrist.org/start-chapter/>.

For More Info...

Look up info regarding club policy at high schools in your parish boundaries. Contact Student Activities Offices to learn what clubs there are already and what things you can be doing to support your teens.

Below are website links and contact information for Student Activities Offices at public school jurisdictions in the Diocese as well as main contacts for the school system.

Arlington County Public Schools

<https://www.apsva.us/>

Main contact: 703-228-6000

Clarke County Public Schools

<https://www.clarke.k12.va.us/>

Main contact: 540-955-6100

Culpeper County Public Schools

<https://cchs.culpeperschools.org/>

Main contact: 540-825-8310

Fairfax County Public Schools

Student Activities and Athletics:

<https://www.fcps.edu/department/student-activities-and-athletics>

Phone: 571-423-1260

Email: FCPSSAAP@fcps.edu

FCPS Main contact: 571-423-3000

Fauquier

<https://www.fcps1.org/>

Main contact: 540-422-7000

Frederick County Public Schools

<https://www.frederick.k12.va.us/>

Main contact: 540-662-3888

King George County Public Schools

<https://www.kgcs.k12.va.us/>

Main contact: Phone: 540-775-5833

Loudon County Public Schools

<https://www.lcps.org/>

Main contact: 571-252-1000

Madison County Public Schools

<https://www2.madisonschools.k12.va.us/>

Main contact: 540-948-3780

Northumberland County Public Schools

<http://www.nucps.net/>

Main contact: 804-529-6134

Orange County Public Schools

<http://www.ocss-va.org/>

Main contact: 540-661-4550

Page County Public Schools

<https://sites.google.com/pagecounty.k12.va.us/pagecountyschools/page-county-public-schools>

Main contact: 540-743-6533

Prince William County Public Schools

Student Activities:

https://www.pwcs.edu/academics__programs/student_activities

Phone: 703-791-7353

PWCPS, Main contact: 703-791-7200

Rappahannock County Public Schools

<http://rappahannockcountysd.schoolinsites.com/>

Main contact: 540-227-0745

Shenandoah Public Schools

<https://www.shenandoah.k12.va.us/?showHomepage=true>

Main contact: 540-459-6222

Spotsylvania County Public Schools

<https://www.spotsylvania.k12.va.us/>

Main contact: 540-834-2500

Warren County Public Schools

<https://www.wcps.k12.va.us/>

Phone (main contact): 540-635-2171

Westmoreland County Public Schools

<http://division.wmlcps.org/schools.html>

Main contact: 804-493-8018