

Ten Tips for First Year Directors of Youth Ministry

by Angie Pometto

Congratulations! You've just accepted a Director of Youth Ministry (DYM) position! Maybe you've been a youth ministry volunteer for a few years, perhaps you remember having fun at youth ministry events in high school, or maybe you've studied theology or youth ministry at a Catholic college. There are many different paths to this point, but whatever path you took, be forewarned: everything you ever thought you knew about being a youth minister is about to be thrown out the window.

When you accept the call to become a DYM, you agree to become a type of Superman: not that you have to smash down walls or shoot objects with your laser eyes, but you do need to be good at a little bit of everything. In one day, a DYM might work on finances or budgeting, plan an event, create a flier to publicize said event, talk to a troubled teen or parent, sign twenty forms, make copies, respond to multiple e-mails, write and send several mass e-mails, play ping pong or Apples to Apples with teens, and if there is time, eat lunch (or dinner).

But just as Superman received his powers through his birthright, the same is true for us. We receive all that is needed from our heavenly Father. The biggest lesson a DYM can learn is that of humility and weakness. At the times when you feel completely overwhelmed and exhausted, God steps in and works His strength through you. For when we are weak, He truly is strong, and that is a hard lesson to learn.

So to help you make the transition into youth ministry work, **here is a list of 10 tips to remember during your first year of ministry:**

10. Learn who does what at the parish. Parish staffs can be strange entities. Everyone has a certain role and job, and it's important to know who does what. And no matter how many parishes you've served in, each parish is different. If possible, ask the former DYM (if there was one) to give you a list of who does what at the parish. It is vital for a DYM to know who is in charge of receipts or check requests, bulletin announcements, and room requests. And then learn what everyone else does, too.
9. Learn how to communicate with your pastor. Every pastor is different. Some prefer e-mails or texts, some prefer phone calls, and some prefer that you catch them in person whenever you need something. Knowing how to communicate with your pastor is crucial to starting any youth ministry position. Meet with your pastor and get a very clear understanding of what he expects from you. Study these expectations regularly if you want to keep your job!
8. Dress professionally whenever possible. How you dress makes a difference in how others view you. Youth ministry is a job that often requires casual dress. If you know you'll be spending time with teens playing frisbee or laser tag, you can't really be in your Sunday best. However, on days when you know it'll just be straight office work, take the time to dress as you would working in any other office environment.
7. Put in as many "normal" hours as possible. So much of a DYM's job is done in the evenings or on the weekends. It is important to let yourself be seen at your desk during 9 to 5 business hours (or whatever those "core" hours are at your parish). If this means that perhaps 10-15 hours a week are worked outside this time, then the remaining 25-30 hours should be at times

when the staff is also around so that they know you are serious about your job. This also makes relationship-building within the office and collaboration easier.

6. Get to know your fellow DYMs. Youth ministry is a demanding profession, but you don't have to serve in isolation. Reach out and get to know other DYMs in the diocese. Use them as resources and don't be afraid to ask questions. Participate in the diocesan youth ministry events, trainings, workshops, in-services, and seminars. These gatherings are designed to support and rejuvenate the DYMs and are also good chances to network.
5. Get to know your youth ministry volunteers. Invite your volunteers to lunch or coffee to get to know them better. Learn why they are involved with youth ministry and ask for their input on the programs. If they have helped at the parish before, they will have seen what works well and probably what did not work. Listen to them and take their advice when planning programs.
4. Put yourself out there. It is hard to become part of a new community! It is not going to happen right away. It takes time for people to get to know you; that is okay. Be patient, and give people the time they need. Remember to do your part as well. Do not pass up opportunities to eat lunch with the staff, participate in the church festivals and events, or spend time getting to know parents and families of the teens you work with. Eventually, you will become part of the parish community.
3. Do not force relationships with teens. When starting at a new parish, it can be frustrating if you do not immediately feel included in the community. You may feel like you have failed if you haven't spoken to all the teens at a particular event. You may also want to seek out relationships with certain teens who seem influential among their peers. Be patient and allow your inclusion into this new group of people to happen naturally. Whatever teens God puts in front of you, be present to them. Don't stress about wanting to get to know everyone all at once. Instead, use the time with the one or two teens that are drawn to you and get to know them well. You will be able to grow from there.
2. Do not make significant changes immediately. Change comes slowly for most people. Let conversations with your pastor serve as your guide for making changes. Allow the parish community to get to know you, and consider holding off on considerable changes you deem necessary until your second year of ministry at a parish. As a new person in the parish, you will be compared to whomever was in your position before you.
1. Pray daily. A typical DYM workday can feel incredibly busy. There is never a shortage of things to do. But despite the hectic, busy schedule, it is imperative that you set aside time to pray. Find something you can do consistently each day, whether that is going to Mass, praying a rosary, or going for a visit to the Blessed Sacrament at the end of your day. If you do not force yourself to have regular daily prayer time, your days will start flying by without any prayer at all. DYMs who do not pray daily do not last long.

Take these tips to heart, and good luck in your first year as a DYM!

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