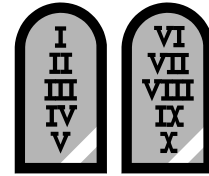


The Ten Commandments of Relational Youth Ministry Practice

by David Bristow



In an attempt to foster relational ministry practice, I hereby set forth the ten commandments of relational youth ministry practice. My hope would be that Catholic Directors of Youth Ministry (DYMs) everywhere would take two primary ideas from them - the first being that personal “face time” with the youth is just as important (if not more so) than setting up a perfect youth night, and the second being that prayer, in the context of a striving for holiness, is the most faithful ministry tool one can possess.

With respect to the first idea, DYMs cannot get lost in the day-to-day workings of a ministry program to the neglect of their youth. At times we are forced to leave the office and our “busy work” so that we can visit the youth in their schools and homes, at their games and plays. *This point is critical.* The youth do not so much remember a great youth event or advertising poster as much as they do the relationships bridged with adult mentors and the other teens that care for them. A great way of getting “face time” is to make a sign-up sheet of the teens’ upcoming events. Have them give you places and times of their events and then make room in your schedule to attend as many as possible. Youth ministry is thus not about creating a perfect program; it is about creating relationships in Christ’s truth, freedom, and radical care.

In further discussing the second idea, DYMs must engage in prayer and sacramental devotion on behalf of themselves and their youth. Every week DYMs need to make time in order to pray for their youth and the ministry of the parish as a whole. A great way of doing this can be before your youth nights even begin. Ask some of the youth to come early so that they too can pray with you, setting up a foundation of prayer in the community. People tend to forget that relational ministry is not so much about the relationship between DYM and youth, but rather the relationship between the DYM, their youth, and our Blessed Lord.

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1. Seek to become a *faithful* youth minister ever before attempting to be an effective, relevant, or progressive one (Galatians 2:16).
2. Don’t merely be yourself around the youth; *be like Jesus Christ who points to the will of the Father in Heaven* (Matthew 10:32).
3. Regularly participate in sacramental practices (i.e. Eucharistic Adoration, Confession, etc.) on the youth’s behalf as much as for your own (John 6:48). At the same time, immerse yourself daily in the ‘Word of God’ (2 Timothy 3:16).
4. Actively pray for the youth you encounter and/or serve. Afterwards, tell them how blessed you are to be in their presence or to have made their acquaintance (Matthew 6:9).
5. Love and accept the youth for who they are *now* and not for what you hope they become later (John 8:11).

6. Praise the youth openly and vocally without embarrassing them; discipline the youth quietly and respectfully without drawing unnecessary attention upon them (Luke 6:31).
7. ‘Awkwardness’ is simply another way in which God reminds us that we are not Him. Don’t fear silence or uncomfortable quiet moments when engaging the youth; rather learn to exhibit patience *with* them instead of always talking in their place (Galatians 5:22).
8. Sit, eat, dance, sing, play, smile, worship, and pray with the youth *by their sides* – always and everywhere (Mark 10:15).
9. Be of the mindset that the youth can teach you as much as you can teach the youth. Doing so empowers the youth while simultaneously showing them true humility and openness (Proverbs 22:4).
10. Conduct all relational ministry practices with the knowledge that there is no such thing as a Youth Ministry Utopia – *there is only sacrificial youth ministry*. The joys of youth ministry are often found in the sacrifices and toils of loving the youth unconditionally (Mark 10:21).

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