

June 2010

Highlights of this Issue

Youth Ministry and Parents: A Team Approach

Parents are essential to engaging young people in a life of discipleship. Our church documents make this point and all of the research reiterates this. As youth ministry leaders we often share the challenges of involving parents in the youth ministry programs of the parish, as well as encouraging them to fulfill the role of teacher/catechist for their children in their homes. Often, this is not as easy as it may sound.

In this issue of the NACYML Newsletter, several authors have written articles and compiled resources in the hope of providing assisting and insight into teaming up with parents in the context of youth ministry. We hope that you find the contents of this issue beneficial.

Blessings on each of you, and your ministry, during the upcoming summer months!

Ministry to and with Parents: The Pain and the Promise

I do believe that most parents want their children to have faith. However, most parents feel inadequate to talk about faith because they think it is theology. Rather than call parents the "primary religious educator of their children", which implies the cognitive dimension of education, perhaps we need to use a different title in addressing their critical role.

[Continue reading Bob McCarty's article...](#)

Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth

There is an unspoken fear that leading a gathering of parents will take on qualities of a Charlie Brown comic, with parents hearing only 'wah-wah-wah'. The experiences of this past year in the Diocese of Orlando with the Strong Catholic Families program have been putting that fear to rest while offering hope to parishes interested in establishing a vibrant and life-giving relationship with parents.

[Read Michelle Fischer's article here...](#)

Communicating, Connecting, and Partnering with Parents

We have the privilege of working with our teens' parents to teach the faith to their children by giving them resources, opportunities for growth, and our full encouragement in their God-given task, as well as backing up their efforts with programming on the parish, deanery, diocesan, and national levels. It is a great plan. But while both sides of this partnership know that we should be working together, very often it seems as though we are at odds with one another.

[Read the rest of Pia Kayo's article...](#)

From the Chair

When I was asked by a group of parents if I would give a presentation on parenting, I decided to borrow an approach from David Letterman



and offer to the parents a top ten list. This list was something I put together based on the needs I have seen in working with young people. I share it with you in the hope that you, too, may find it helpful in ministering to the parents in your community.

[Read more of Glen McCall's article...](#)

Perspectives: Dying to Know You Better

Lisa-Marie Calderone-Stewart is a youth ministry pioneer and tireless advocate of adolescents. She has authored dozens of youth ministry books and articles, served as associate director of early adolescent ministry for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, and founded a leadership development program for teens called Tomorrow's Present. In spring of 2009 she was diagnosed with stage IV cancer and last October doctors told her she had six months to live.

[Continue reading the article here...](#)

Challenges and Change

Parents are not the problem (but they are a huge part of the solution). Church workers who rail at parents because they 'stop, drop and roll' (stop at the parish, to drop off their children, and roll on to more important things) need to look more deeply at what is happening. As the venerable Pogo cartoon says...


[Continue reading Sean Reynolds' article here...](#)

Announcements and Important Information

**National Association of Catholic Youth Ministry Leaders
Biennial Membership Meeting
Thursday, December 9, 2010**

Featured Speaker: Monsignor Ray East

A not-to-be-missed opportunity to connect with colleagues from around the country. Spend time in prayer, building community and moving NACYML forward in the years ahead. Find challenge and inspiration in time spent with Monsignor East. Don't miss out on this valuable benefit of membership in NACML. Lunch is provided as part of the meeting day. See you in New Orleans!

Download the information flyer for the meeting.  (82 KB)

Input Needed on NACYML Leadership Team Candidates

NACYML members are asked to provide comments and feedback on the four candidates applying for the leadership positions beginning January 2011. Each candidate's responses to the application questions are available on the [NACYML members' website](#). Feedback and comments should be sent to Joan Martinez, via e-mail, at mjoanandpete@juno.com no later than August 19, 2010.

The Discernment Committee and Leadership Team will confer in order to make a recommendation to the NFCYM Board. Selected candidates will be affirmed by the NFCYM Board of Directors at the August 2010 meeting, after which all applicants will be notified of results.

NCCYM Registration Discount for NACYML Members

NACYML Members receive a \$20.00 discount off the full NCCYM registration fee. In order to claim the discount, NACYML members must enter the special discount code during the online registration process. The discount code is available on the members' website.

Remember to register for the biennial meeting while registering for NCCYM!

Visit the [NACYML Members' Website](#) for further information and announcements.

A Picture Is Worth . . .


Articles in this newsletter correspond to the Core Competencies detailed in the National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers.


Look for the symbol in the article that indicates which core competency the article addresses.



To learn more about the standards, see the [resource page](#) which is always accessible from the newsletter navigation bar. It provides a summary of the core competencies and the specialized competencies for youth ministry leaders.



Print the Newsletter!

- Use your browser's print function or click on the  "Print this page" link at the bottom of the right-hand navigation column to print an individual page.
- Print the entire issue (PDF) by using the link below. Or, download this PDF to your computer by right-clicking the link and selecting "Save Target As..."



 Download the PDF print file for this entire issue.  (xxx KB)

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June 2010

From the Chair

Glen McCall

NACYML Chairperson

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church

Hawthorne, New Jersey

A Top Ten for Raising Teens

Whenever I stay up later than I should, I like to watch David Letterman. One of my favorite segments is the Top Ten List. I do not know why, but it appeals to me. Maybe it is because it condenses the chaos surrounding an event into a nice neat list.

When I was asked by a group of parents if I would give a presentation on parenting, I decided to borrow Mr. Letterman's approach and offer to the parents a top ten list. This list was something I put together based on the needs I have seen in working with young people. I share it with you in the hope that you, too, may find it helpful in ministering to the parents in your community.



Here is the list . . .

10. Get to Know Your Child's Friends and Their Parents

One of the best ways to keep a teenager on the right track is to know who they hang out with. Getting to know their friends and their friend's parents will aid in making both your lives much easier.

9. No One Is Perfect

There is a difference between being the best and doing your best. The pressures placed on teens today go far beyond anything we ever experienced as teens. We as adults and parents need to realize that our children are not perfect in everything we desire for them. All we can ask is that they do their best.

8. Teens Need to Be Taught Life Skills

One of the high school seniors recently said to me, "If it was not for my involvement in youth group, I would have never learned things like how to run a small group, how to ask questions, or even how to act in an interview."

Our young people need to learn the basic life skills that we take for granted—the proper way to shake hands, rituals surrounding a wake and funeral, or interview skills for employment or college entrance—all need to be taught to our young people.

7. Teens Need More Supervision Than Younger Children

Not much explaining needs to be done here. However, most parents are under the impression that as their child gets older, the less supervision they require. The reality is, they actually need more supervision because the life experiences of a teen will carry greater challenges and consequences.

6. Fifteen Minutes Daily of One-on-One Time with Each Child

With all the craziness that life has to offer, this is probably the most challenging task for parents to accomplish. Yet, the rewards are priceless! Whether it is in the car on the way to soccer practice or just before going to bed, this one-on-one time will give the teen time to share both the high points and low points of their day. It also allows time for questions she/he finds difficult to ask when others are present.



5. Be Realistic in Your Expectations of Your Child

The one question I ask parents concerning their expectations for their child is "Would you be able to survive your child's schedule?" Most of the time the response is "No."

I am amazed at the schedules of some of our teens, getting up at five in the morning to attend a sports practice, then off to school, followed by another sport or part-time job, then off to their tutor or SAT prep course. Finally, arriving home around 8:00 PM to have dinner and do their homework and then bed at midnight. At five the next morning it all begins again.

Why do we expect this type of schedule for our young people?

4. Educate Your Child in Financial Responsibility

If we do not do this, we are setting them up for failure. Have we taught our children to save for a rainy day? Have we established a checking account for them and shown them how to reconcile a bank statement? Have we helped them create a budget to pay for things such as a car (and insurance), college expenses, and other needs?

3. Saying "No," "Because I said so," and "I do not care what everyone else is doing," Will *not* Kill Your Child (or cause years of future therapy)

Did any of these phrases kill us when they were spoken to us by our parents? Of course not. Sometimes, these are the most appropriate words to say given the situation. And, guess what . . . one day your child will use the same words on your grandchildren!

2. Consistency, Consistency, Consistency

Young people need consistency, especially in the area of setting boundaries. Being fair and consistent in setting expectations and boundaries will bring positive results!

1. Foster Faith Skills for Adulthood

It is our faith that will help us through whatever should cross our path as we journey through life. But, we must encourage our children to develop their faith skills just as we encourage them to develop their educational skills.

I hope this top ten list is something you will find useful in ministering to young people and their parents!

[E-Mail NACYML](#)

June 2010

Dying to Know You Better

From the Blog of Lisa-Marie Calderone-Stewart
Milwaukee, Wisconsin



Editor's Note: Lisa-Marie Calderone-Stewart is a youth ministry pioneer and tireless advocate of adolescents. She has [authored dozens of youth ministry books](#) and articles, served as associate director of early adolescent ministry for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, and founded a leadership development program for teens called [Tomorrow's Present](#). In spring of 2009 she was diagnosed with stage IV cancer and last October doctors told her she had six months to live. As we put this June 2010 newsletter together, Lisa's work and her words continue to inspire us to pay attention to what is most important in life. Through her dying, she is teaching us how to live.

From Lisa's Journal Entry, May 10, 2010:

Today is the birthday of my youngest niece, Barbara. She loves hearing family stories. She always asks me to remember something funny she said or did.

So this one is for Barbara... she turns 13 today! A true teenager!

When she was two, or maybe two and a half years old, I was visiting. She stood by the refrigerator and quietly asked what seemed to be, "Ab-Weesah wassah wemoway?" I had no idea what she was saying. I said, "Barbara, could you say that again?" She very politely repeated herself: "Ab-Weesah wassah wemoway."

This didn't help. I hated to ask her again, but I had no idea what she was saying. She turned her head to the side, and her eyes opened wide with obvious frustration and she cried out while banging a cup on the counter, "AH-WEEŠAH WASSAH WEMOWAY????!!!"

I stood there, helpless. "Barbara, I'm sorry, I just don't know what you are trying to tell me. Can you show me what you want?" She collapsed on the floor in front of the refrigerator and banged her cup on it. "Wemoway. Wemoway!!!!!! WEMOWAY!!!!!!!!!!!"

Heidi, her mother, came into the kitchen. I asked her, "Do you know what Barbara is trying to say?" We asked her to say it one more time. She sighed, looked up at the ceiling and repeated, "Ab-Weesah wassah wemoway."

Heidi looked at me as if I were dumber than dirt. How could I not understand? "Aunt Lisa, want some lemonade?" Barbara jumped up, all smiles, and showed me her cup again. "Oh!" I said, feeling... dumber than dirt.

"She's asking you if you want some because she wants some."

"I would love some lemonade! Would you like me to pour you some lemonade, too?"

"Yes, Ab-weesah! Pweeze!"

This would not even be much of a story, except for all those times we drink lemonade, and we look at each other and say, "Ab-weesah wassah wemoway" and laugh ourselves silly... "Wemoway"... such a silly little thing...

There's a famous bit of wisdom I'm sure you have heard, attributed to Robert Brault: "Enjoy the little things for one day you may look back and realize they were the big things."

I'm dying to enjoy all those little things...



Lisa's CaringBridge Blog Information

To read the ongoing entries in Lisa's blog, visit her CaringBridge page:

www.caringbridge.org/visit/lisacalderone

Lisa's writings elicit laughter and tears, but most all, they are a source of profound insight and inspiration. One of her posts reads, "...it is often said a life has been well lived if one of three things are brought about: children who keep blessing, knowledge that keeps teaching, and charity that keeps giving". Lisa has certainly blessed the world and the field of youth ministry with all three.

Lisa also continues to be a guest blogger for U.S. Catholic online.

[E-Mail NACYML](#)

June 2010

Challenges and Change

Sean Reynolds, D.Min.
 Director, Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry
 Archdiocese of Cincinnati
 Cincinnati, Ohio

It has been more than three years now that we here in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati have been working intensively with the findings of the *National Study of Youth and Religion* (NSYR), and here are some of the nuggets of wisdom we have uncovered along the way:

Parents are not the problem (but they are a huge part of the solution): church workers who rail at parents because they 'stop, drop, and roll' (*stop* at the parish, to *drop* off their children, and *roll* on to more important things) need to look more deeply at what is happening. As the venerable Pogo cartoon says . . .

We have met the enemy, and he is us: In this, Jesus invites us to remove the planks from our own eyes first, that we might have "eyes that see" what is really happening. For decades, for generations in fact, we have been communicating to parents both implicitly and explicitly to leave faith formation to the professionals—catechists, youth ministers, teachers, schools, nuns, priests, CCD, parish schools of religion, deacons, lay ministers, faith formation programs, and deacons—but not parents. We give lip service to the family as the domestic church, yet most of our parishes slice families into discrete pieces and serve up programs for the pieces, led by 'the pros.' As my good friend Dobie Moser frequently says, "This is far too important to leave to the professionals." In other words, we need to unlearn years of habitual default ways of doing religious education and ministry based on the assumption that faith formation mainly happens at church and is done by almost anyone but parents. Sadly, this has led us to a . . .



Consumer/provider ministry model: Like just about everyone in this country, we have been shaped by a consumer culture, so we all too often default to a consumer/provider model without noticing. This is apparent in many of our programs and even our sacramental preparation. Think about it, if you attend certain sessions you 'get' a sacrament. Once you get the sacrament, you are done. Is not this far too often how it goes with confirmation, our 'sacrament of graduation from church'? The NSYR powerfully points us in a very different direction, one that puts . . .

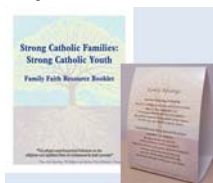
Parents and families first: Ironically, the NSYR confirms what all our catechetical documents say: parents are, bar none, the most powerful formators of their children's faith. Nothing else even comes close. Some people say that we need to find better ways of partnering with parents. True, but not true enough. Parents and families need to be central and primary, so that we are supporting their efforts and not the other way around. Maybe we need to borrow Home Depot's slogan, "You can do it. We can help." Unfortunately, the lingo of 'partnering' can still leave us at the center of the faith project in young people's lives, with parents pretty much sidelined until we need drivers, chaperones, and deep pockets to pay for mission trips and other big-ticket items.



So, What Must We Do?

We need nothing less than to rethink our assumptions about youth ministry, and strike out in some radically new directions. Below are some ideas that might help get our imaginations going.

- **Sacramental preparation versus sacramental ministry**
 The word preparation implies an endpoint, which typically is reception of a sacrament. Sacramental ministry suggests ongoing, seamless ministry efforts between, before, during, and after sacraments, and helps us live sacramental lives, e.g., not just going to Mass, but living the Eucharist.
- **Rethink and restructure confirmation**
 If you have joint or sole responsibility for confirmation, maybe you can start with this thought experiment: What would confirmation look like if it were centered in the family, with parents as principal catechists who are assisted, resourced, and mentored by church ministers? I am proud that we have some talented and courageous youth ministers here in our archdiocese doing just that.
- **Do faith goals at graduation**
 In seventh or eighth grade, meet with a young person and his/her parent(s) to explore: what are your faith goals at graduation from high school? To become a person of prayer? A person of Christian service and justice? A person engaged in the faith community? A person who gets what it means to live as a Catholic? Then map out a set of goals that parents, family, youth minister, and youth agree to work on—together.
- **Conduct a youth ministry family impact study**
 Read the USCCB document *A Family Perspective in Church and Society* and do a family impact study on your youth ministry program to learn what impact it is having on the families of the young people who participate. Even better, advocate for such a study to be done with your entire parish.
- **Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate**
 Sorry to break the news, but if our youth ministry is pretty much a solo/silo operation, we are probably more a problem than a solution. Granted, collaboration requires willing partners, and if that is the issue, use the NSYR research to build bridges of cooperation and collaboration. The research points all our ministries directly to parents and families—something all parish ministries share and have a big stake in.
- **Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth**
 To bring this message to a broad audience of priests, diocesan leaders, other parish ministry leaders, and parents themselves, advocate to bring the Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth training program to your diocese. [Download More Information on the Program.](#)
[E-Mail NACYML](#)



June 2010

Ministry to and with Parents: The Pain and the Promise

Robert McCarty
Executive Director
National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry
Washington, DC

We are all familiar with the official church documents that emphasize the role of parents in the faith formation of their children. "Parents above others are obliged to form their children in the faith and practice of the Christian life by word and example." (*Code of Canon Law*) "Parents are the most influential agents of catechesis for their children." (*National Directory of Catechesis*) But how about the most common statement, "What? Are you kidding me?" (Anonymous parent).



I do believe that most parents want their children to have faith. However, most parents feel inadequate to talk about faith because they think it is theology. Rather than call parents the "primary religious educator of their children," which implies the cognitive dimension of education, perhaps we need to use a different title in addressing their critical role. How about 'faith formator' or 'faith connector,' whereby they are connecting their children and youth to the faith community and to other faith filled young people and adults?

This change in language would also require that catechetical and youth ministers see themselves more as 'partners with parents' in the faith formation of their youth. We do not abdicate our role as ministry leaders, but we would shift some of our time and energy.



The *National Study of Youth and Religion* (NSYR) found that the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents. But when we say we want to assist parents in fostering the faith of their children, how we define "faith" impacts our strategies and approaches.

There are three dimensions to faith. Faith as believing is the cognitive or intellectual dimension, the content of our beliefs: the creeds, traditions, and teachings. It is the *WHAT* we believe. Faith as trusting is the affective dimension that emphasizes the need to develop a relationship of trust with a personal God; the *WHO* we believe. Faith as doing is the behavioral or action dimension; it is the *HOW* we live out our faith.

Imaging faith as having dimensions of 'head, heart, and hands' provides a way for pastoral leaders to develop a comprehensive approach and provides us a way to engage parents in the faith formation process. Parents may feel inadequate in providing the content of faith, but given the proper support and opportunities, parents can more easily address faith as a relationship with Jesus Christ and to support the skills and actions required of disciples.

There are several underlying strategies for parish and school leaders.

- Build a case for why faith is important *and* why religion is important. I do not think we can assume this in our post modern world that often separates the vertical and horizontal dimensions of faith and religion.
- See all adult gatherings as opportunities for adult catechesis. Sacramental preparation meetings, parent meetings for youth ministry, Sunday liturgy, and parish-wide events should all include a catechetical element.
- Create a Family Life Committee of parents (and teens?) to develop a vision and practical strategies for engaging and supporting parents.
- Create focus groups where parents with similar needs, concerns, and circumstances can gather for mutual support and assistance.
- Develop take home tools about Catholicism, living one's faith, or fostering family communications.
- Create a 'Question of the Week' that families can discuss over dinner or while driving in the car. The questions can focus on faith, Scripture, the Sunday readings, or family experiences. The aim is to foster faith conversations.
- Use the parish/school bulletins and websites as teaching tools; e.g., insert a fact of the week, practice of the week, prayer of the month, saint of the week, and connect to other websites and resources.
- Consider intergenerational programming that includes parents, grandparents, siblings, godparents, and aunts/uncles. Such events might include liturgy, service opportunities, retreats, catechesis, and other youth ministry programs.
- Be intentional in welcoming young people to the faith community and engaging young people and their families in the liturgical and pastoral life of the parish.

NFCYM Resources

The NFCYM is implementing our Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth project to enable parish, school, and diocesan pastoral leaders to more effectively engage and support parents in the faith formation of their children.

- Learn More about this training service.
- Additionally, visit NFCYM's Family and Parent Web Resource Area.

Parish and school leaders should also consider how to best support parents in those strategies specific to them. Practices for parents include:

- Blessing their children each night and/or before they go out of the house
- Saying grace before meals both at home and in restaurants
- Praying with their children
- Creating family religious traditions around Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving
- Doing service as a family
- Having religious art in the home
- Attending Mass together
- Participating in school and parish life/activities
- Creating family faith celebrations (sacraments, weddings, funerals, etc.)

[E-Mail NACMYL](mailto:info@nacym.org)



June 2010

Tips for Using Scripture at Home

Faye E. Abbondanza

Associate Director

Diocese of Youngstown

Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry

Stories of Faith

Just as we gather and share our family stories while sitting around the dinner table, our faith stories need to be shared in the same way. We get to know our loved ones by hearing their stories and spending time with them. The same is true of our ancestors in faith.



If you have never been to the celebration of the Easter Vigil, you need to plan ahead for next year because it is a real family event. At the Easter Vigil, we read stories from Scripture that span the history of salvation. There are seven readings from the Hebrew Scriptures and two readings from the Christian Scriptures. At this celebration, and at every Mass, we share our family stories and gather around the table of the Lord. Not only is Scripture proclaimed in the readings of the liturgy, but also through many of the prayers and responses we use. Many of our Protestant brothers and sisters say that we Catholics do not know Scripture, but I truly believe we know more than we think by virtue of attending weekly liturgy. We do not always know just where to find it in the Bible.

Here Is the Challenge

We must encourage our families to read and learn Scripture. Do not be daunted by this task, remember to impress upon our parents and our young people that the Bible is a library full of books. There is something for everyone. There are stories, poetry, letters, histories, etc. A variety of literary styles that share a common thread, these are the stories of our faith. There are many resources available to help families with this task. Following are a few ideas to help parents get started, followed by some helpful resources. (This is not an exhaustive list).



- Make a habit of reading the Bible together
- Read the weekly readings in preparation for Sunday liturgy
- Designate (and decorate) a prayer space where family members can go to read and pray
- Learn the Psalms by praying the liturgy of the hours at home
- Choose a book, or section of Scripture, to study as a family
- Put favorite Scripture quotes on an index card and place a new one to learn each week on the bathroom mirror
- Read Scripture for your meal prayer at the family dinner
- Discuss the readings and homily in the car on the way home from church
- Make up games to help you remember Scripture characters, stories, places, etc.
- Put yourself into the stories as you read them

RESOURCES

Bibles, Study Guides, and Commentaries for Families and Youth

- [Catholic Family Connections Bible](#)
- [Catholic Youth Bible](#)
- [The Catholic Faith and Family Bible](#)
- [Fireside Catholic Youth Bible](#)

Lectionary Readings with Reflections

- [Living Liturgy](#)
- [At Home with the Word](#)
- [In Touch with the Word](#)
- [The Word to Go 2010-2011](#)
- [Youth Engaging Scripture: Diving into the Sunday Gospels](#)
- [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#)

Other Helpful Publications

- [Your Catholic Family: Simple Ways to Share the Faith at Home](#)
- [A Catholic Guide to the Bible](#)
- [Responses to 101 Questions on the Bible](#)
- [Know It! Pray It! Live It! A Family Guide to the Catholic Youth Bible](#)
- [Bible Reading for Beginners](#)
- [Bible Express](#)
- [Pocket Bible Guide](#)

Publisher Websites for Additional Family Resources

- [Saint Mary's Press](#)
- [Fireside Catholic Publishing](#)
- [Center for Ministry Development](#)
- [The Word among Us](#)
- [Saint Anthony Messenger Press](#)
- [Catholic Book Publishing](#)
- [Paulist Press](#)
- [Liturgy Training Publications](#)
- [Liturgical Press](#)
- [Disciples Now](#)
- [Pflaum Publishing](#)
- [Loyola Press](#)
- [Pastoral Planning.com](#)
- [Sadlier Religion Programs](#)
- [Catholic Book Publishers Association](#)

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June 2010

Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth

Michelle Fischer
Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry
Diocese of Orlando
Orlando, Florida

Parents are essential to engaging our youth in a life of discipleship. Our church documents make this point and the research bears this out, from the [National Study of Youth and Religion](#) (NSYR) to the [Spirit of Youth Ministry Project](#). As youth ministry leaders we often share the challenges of involving parents in the youth ministry programs of the parish. A new initiative from the [National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry](#) (NFCYM), *Strong Catholic Families, Strong Catholic Youth* (SCF-SCY), was developed to provide parish leaders with this new perspective as they strive to engage and partner with parents to support them in their primary role of forming the faith of their families.



The SCF-SCY Program in Orlando

There is an unspoken fear that leading a gathering of parents will take on qualities of a Charlie Brown comic, with parents hearing only 'wah-wah-wah'. The experiences of this past year in the Diocese of Orlando with the Strong Catholic Families program have been putting that fear to rest while offering hope to parishes interested in establishing a vibrant and life-giving relationship with parents.

In the SCF-SCY parent session, parents listen intently to the information that affirms what their heart already knows; they are irreplaceable in the faith life of their child. Given the opportunity, parents are eager to share their stories of family faith, their concerns, and their prayers. I have witnessed a room of parents sharing with one another stories of their child's baptism and discussing the prayers they held in their hearts for their children on those days. As they shared there were smiles, laughter, great energy, a few teary eyes, and not a yawn in sight.

Parents are Hungry for Family Resources

Many parents will reach for pen and paper when they hear an idea they want to take home. Sharing questions and personal reflections enriches the time spent in this setting. As I concluded a session recently, one of the mothers stayed to chat afterwards. After a few moments of conversation she left, saying "I can not wait to get home and start using some of the ideas I heard tonight and to see what else is in this booklet."

The SCF-SCY focus on taking a new perspective with parents re-energizes parish leadership as well as the entire faith community. Knowing how essential parents are to the formation of their youth, parishes can be more intentional and aware of how they provide opportunities for parents to engage in faith conversations and activities with their family, both at the parish and in the home. Parishes are finding a broad range of new possibilities as they work collaboratively to engage parents within the ministry of the parish.



SCF-SCY is not a program, it is a perspective. Parishes intentionally choose to begin this process which seeks to integrate this new mindset into the entire life and ministry of the parish. If you are interested in partnering with parents at this meaningful level of engagement, then consider offering the SCF-SCY in-service program.

[View more information on the Strong Catholic Families: Strong Catholic Youth program.](#)

[E-Mail NACYML](#)

June 2010

Communicating, Connecting, and Partnering with Parents

Pia Kayo
Coordinator of Youth Ministry
Church of St. Timothy
Escondido, California

“Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognized as the primary and principal educators.” [Declaration on Christian Education \(Gravissimum Educationis\)](#), Pope Paul VI, October 28, 1965

Parents as Catechists

Parents are the primary catechists of our young people. Youth ministers, DREs, teachers, and volunteers are their partners in ministry. We have the privilege of working with our teens' parents to teach the faith to their children by giving them resources, opportunities for growth, and our full encouragement in their God-given task, as well as backing up their efforts with programming on the parish, deanery, diocesan, and national levels. It is a great plan. But while both sides of this partnership know that we should be working together, very often it seems as though we are at odds with one another. We feel that the parents in our programs do not understand or support our efforts in helping them catechize their young people, and they feel like we do not understand or support their desire to balance faith formation with the rest of their busy lives. What do we do, then, to restore, or even create, the partnership that is necessary to give our young people the best chance at becoming people of lifelong faith?



Communication With Parents

Every successful partnership is based on good communication: a two-way street of information sharing, support, and mutual understanding. Creating and maintaining a network of written correspondence, a telephone tree, and a one-stop spot where parents can go for quick details on upcoming events and resources while giving them the opportunity to ask questions and offer suggestions is crucial. This can be accomplished with a weekly e-mail blast (get parents' e-mail addresses from their parish registration forms or at your fall program registration) and a follow-up phone call to each family from their teen's small group leader or teacher. Parents can reply to the e-mails or chat with the small group leader/teacher to ask any questions they may have about the information that may have been distributed that week. Monthly youth ministry newsletters that provide photos and news about events past and future are great, too; to utilize this as a parent resource, consider including an article specifically addressing their needs and listing links to parenting websites or online articles.

Many youth ministries now have dedicated websites that parents and students can access at their own convenience. This is a great way to communicate with everyone who is interested in your ministry. On your website, have a way for parents to retrieve forms and event details; start a discussion board where parents can pool their knowledge or ask each other (and you) for advice on different teen-related issues. Take advantage of the Internet's social networking opportunities by creating a page for your youth ministry on [Facebook](#). Create a [Twitter profile](#) for your youth ministry and post a quick 'tweet' (brief message) every other day or so to keep parents and teens up to date on upcoming events and activities. Some savvy youth leaders also use tweets and status updates to post Scripture verses and thoughts for the day or discussion topics for families to break open at the dinner table.



Connecting With Parents

Partnering with parents involves more than simple information transfer, however. Giving them information is important, but building a solid partnership requires also making a real connection with one another. The ideal is to work together to bring these young people closer to Christ. So let parents know that your door is always open to them, and if you have specific office hours be sure to let them know when they are. Give out your business card. Provide parents with your cell number; answer their e-mails and web posts in a timely manner. Be accessible. Get to know them and let them get to know you. You may want to begin the year with a social activity at which you introduce yourself to the parents in your program and encourage them to ask any questions and share their hopes for how their teens will grow in faith during coming year. Check in with your parents periodically throughout the year to ask how you may pray for them. Make a point to say hello to them before or after Mass, and take a moment to chat if you run into them around town. If you are connected on MySpace or Facebook, post a comment on their profile page or wall every now and then. Go out to coffee with them once in a while. However you choose to do it, you must build a relationship with the parents of your teens.

Partnerships With Parents

Partnering with parents means allowing and encouraging them to take up their role as primary catechists and making it clear that you have got their backs. Arm them with the materials, knowledge, and confidence to teach their teens. Help them feel comfortable in passing on the faith to their children. They might not necessarily sit down for a formal home lesson with their young people, but they will teach by example and in brief talks while driving in the car or sitting around the table. Build and maintain a lending library that provides books, magazines, videos, and audio CDs that parents can check out. Include materials on topics of faith and morals as well as parenting, technology, media, and adolescent development. Once a quarter, host a parent night or an afternoon during which you include a social time so all the parents can get to know one another, a prayer time to pray for the young people and their families, and three teaching sessions: a topic that relates faith to daily living, a topic of faith formation, and a topic on parenting adolescents. These teaching sessions do not need to be very long to be effective; spend thirty to forty-five minutes presenting the topic and another fifteen to twenty minutes in small group discussion or another activity to give the parents a chance to unpack what you have presented. Send home packets or handouts reinforcing the topics covered and giving ideas for prayers and faith-related discussions and activities to share with their teens in the interim months. Be sure to provide refreshments and enlist your leadership team to make these events run smoothly and efficiently; they should run only three or four hours maximum, including social time and breaks between talks. Parents are busy people; make the event worth their time away from their families.

Communicating, connecting, and partnering with the parents of the young people to whom we minister is an essential part of our jobs as youth ministers. It does not have to be, nor should it be, seen as an added burden to our already packed schedules. We are blessed in this day and age with innumerable convenient ways to keep in touch, nurture relationships, and relay information. We should take advantage of these tools to help our teens' parents do the job that really belongs to them as the primary catechists of their young people. The more we work with them and see them as our partners in ministry, the more successful the evangelization of our youth will be.

[E-Mail NACYML](#)

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Resources for Keeping Teens Healthy, Safe, and Catholic

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Following are parental and youth ministry resources/websites on parenting, technology use, dating and relationships, faith formation, substance abuse, and violence.



Internet Safety Resources

- [Wired Kids, Inc.](#)
- [Wired Safety](#)
- [SafeKids.Com](#)
- [SafeTeens.com](#)
- [Connect Safely](#)
- [NetSmartz 411](#)
- [FBI: Safe Online Surfing](#)
- [WebWiseKids](#)
- [Protect Kids.com](#)

Parenting Resources

- [Catholic Parenting](#)
- [Center for Ministry Development](#)
- [Domestic Church](#)
- [Catholic Parents](#)
- [St. Joseph's Covenant Keepers](#)
- [Catholic Education Resource Center](#)
- [Faith and Family](#)

Dating and Relationship Resources

- [Chastity.com](#)
- [Sex Respect: Dating and Chastity](#)
- [True Love Waits](#)
- [Real Love, Inc.](#)
- [Parents and Kids, Talking about Sex](#)
- [LifeTeen: Dating and Relationships](#)
- [Good Morals: Sexual Purity Links](#)
- [Love and Responsibility Foundation](#)



Faith Formation Resources

- [Disciples Now](#)
- [Faith First for Families](#)
- [Our Catholic Faith](#)
- [American Catholic](#)

Health, Well-Being, and Substance Abuse Resources

- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)
- [Catholic Therapists Online](#)
- [National Eating Disorders Online](#)
- [National Alcohol and Substance Abuse Information Center](#)
- [American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry](#)
- [Teen Hope Line](#)
- [No Questions Left Behind: Teens Helping Teens](#)



Violence and Bullying Resources

- [Center for the Prevention of School Violence](#)
- [STOP Cyber Bullying](#)
- [Love Your Enemy](#)
- [National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline](#)

Additional resources can be found on the [NACYML website](#) and the [NFCYM Family and Parent Web Resource Area](#).

[E-Mail NACYML](#)