

Structuring an Effective Core Team

by Rob Tessier

The youth ministry Core Team is the group of volunteers who plan, prepare, and execute the main teen gathering at the parish. This gathering is frequently on Sunday nights, but it may take place a different night of the week as well. The idea behind having a “main weekly meeting” is to provide an opportunity to bring in a large number of teens for catechesis, community building, service, and social activities whereby they then go out to participate in their faith life within the parish or other youth ministry offerings.

This article is based on developing a Core Team intended to minister to a Sunday night program that serves the purpose of meeting the catechetical needs of the high school teens along with creating a fun environment where they can engage in community building, spirituality, service, and even leadership. A Core Team can be comprised of four different types of people.

Here is an example of the types of people that might be placed on a Core Team:

1. Young adults- these are volunteers who are either single or newly married that don't have any connection to the teens in the ministry other than the desire to help young people fall more in love with Jesus. It is good if the Core Team is comprised of about 35-50% young adults.
2. Parents- these are volunteers who are identified as being great in working with all the youth, but happen to also have their own child in the youth ministry. Having a 5-15% of the Core represented by parents can be healthy.
3. Clergy/ Consecrated- this could include the priest assigned to youth ministry in the parish, a consecrated member of a religious community, or a deacon. It is a beautiful gift if the Core Team can be comprised of at least 5-15% clergy or consecrated.
4. Teen leaders- these are generally junior and senior teens who have demonstrated qualities of leadership and the desire to be a peer leader. Teens strong in their faith and committed to their peers should represent 35-50% of the Core Team.

The four different types of people each bring a wonderful charism to a team.

Young adults generally have a lot of time and energy to pour into creating exciting activities. In addition, while they are adults, they are closer in age to the teens, providing a solid role model for teens to look to as examples. Parents can provide wisdom and understanding of teens' lives that younger adults don't have. Solid parent leaders also offer a great example to teens of fatherhood, motherhood, and family life. Clergy and consecrated members can bring the group greater spiritual insight and theological understanding, especially when dealing with more difficult subjects. The teens are further inspired by their lifetime commitment to the Church. Teen leaders are vital in assisting with the execution of the activities. A teen perspective can really help planning teams make good decisions on how to most effectively present an activity.

In addition, a teen giving a witness talk is a powerful tool to open the other teens up to opportunities for conversion.

The size of a Core Team should roughly reflect 25% of the size of the youth program. For example, five Core Team members serving a group of twenty teens is good, or ten members for forty teens, or twenty members for eighty teens. The Core Team, if possible, should be split into smaller units called “Planning Teams”. If the Core Team is comprised of six adults and six teens, then consider having three planning teams with two adults and two teens assigned to each. In this

situation, a planning team would be responsible for planning every third Sunday night. The entire Core Team would be needed at every Sunday night to support the plan of the group that is leading. However, the burden of design and preparation only falls on teams periodically instead of weekly. If a Core Team is large enough to have four planning teams, this affords the opportunity to only have to plan for one night a month.

Core Teams need to meet outside of the youth gatherings at least once a month, and possibly twice a month, to plan upcoming nights. These Core Team meetings ideally will take place at a consistent time and place. For example, the first Wednesday of every month from 7-9pm in the Youth Room with pizza provided, is a great way to keep it consistent. It is required that everyone attend. The first forty-five minutes consists of eating & socializing, praying as a group, and having a brief meeting that consists of looking at the schedule and taking an opportunity for some formation. The second part of the meeting is an opportunity to gather into planning teams for the purpose of planning upcoming nights. The CYM should not be on a planning team. The CYM should move around and visit with each Planning Team in an attempt to offer support, input, and ideas. Each planning team should have a coordinator who is responsible for recording the outline of the plan and tracking who has taken charge of various details for the night. The outline of the night should be sent to the CYM a week before the night they are planning for.

Core Teams should also be spiritually fed and formed. The beginning of each semester is a good time to schedule a five to six hour meeting on a Saturday or Sunday that delves into opportunities for prayer & spirituality in addition to presenting formation to help the team members grow in faith & leadership. These are also good opportunities to present the theme for the semester and ideas or resources for each week of the semester.

CYMs should be careful not to simply distribute topics to planning teams without a source of support. Include church documents, books, or other resources to support the teaching points for that topic. Topics should follow a progressive theme/syllabus. The Secondary Religion Guidelines for the Diocese of Arlington should be used to develop your curriculum. There are other organizations and publishers that provide sample youth ministry programs.

In closing, it is not recommended for a CYM to try and be his or her own Core Team. Part of the job of a CYM is to develop other strong volunteer leaders who can then be more branches for the ministry that help to reach out and grow the ministry within a parish.

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