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Mission

4 CORE BELIEFS

YDisciple has four core beliefs that are driving its continued development.

1. We believe that we have to reach out and empower parents to share faith and pray with their teenager.

2. We believe that we have to break teens out of youth culture, that is, their peer dominated mode of existence that is void of trust and transparency with one another and void of meaningful relationships with adults.

3. We believe that we have to be intentional in our time with teens—guiding them to grow in the disciplines of a disciple.

4. We believe that we have to create a user-friendly tool that sets adult mentors up for success when they meet with teens.

WHY DO WE HAVE THESE CORE BELIEFS?

For one, if teenagers come to know and love Jesus in their homes, they will experience Catholicism as a proposition and not an imposition. Secondly, if teenagers have a small group of peers and adult mentors who know and love them, they will have the opportunity to let down their guard and discover their identity in Christ. Third, if we make use of the limited time we have with teenagers to apprentice them in the disciplines of a disciple, they will have the spiritual habits to stand on their own. Finally, it is very counter cultural today for adults to build friendships with teenagers. If we are going to mobilize as many adults as possible to build mentoring relationships with teenagers, it is necessary for them to have a tool that creates a comfortable and supportive environment where trust and transparency is established, critical thinking and discussion takes place, and prayer and faith sharing become the norm.
WHAT IS OUTREACH TO YOUTH THROUGH PARENTS?

“Parents have the responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children.” —CCC 2225

“No plan for organized pastoral work, at any level, must ever fail to take into consideration the pastoral care of the family.” —Familiaris Consortio 70

Any youth ministry initiative should begin with parents. Parents have the greatest influence in the lives of their teenagers, and they will be held accountable to God for the formation of their children. The role of the parish is to assist parents in fulfilling this responsibility. For this reason, the Church teaches that all pastoral work must take into consideration the pastoral care of the family.

Outreach to youth through parents is a strategy to meet the needs of as many teens as possible, within the parish boundaries, by empowering parents to build a discipleship group for their own teenager. Parents are connected to other parents through the friendships and activities of their teenagers. A parent-driven strategy leverages these relationships to do outreach. The greatest driver for the multiplication of small groups is parents talking to other parents.

Teens need to know that their parents care and are invested in their faith formation. They should remember, with gratitude, their small group experience as something their parents did for them. When parents host the small group in their home, they communicate how much they care. This will help facilitate faith sharing with their own teenager.

WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?

Jesus’ invitation to be His disciple is to “lose one’s life” and to “deny oneself” that results in “abundant life.” In other words, discipleship is the process of dying to self and becoming more like Jesus Christ. It is a heroic call—and very countercultural.

Discipleship is apprenticing someone in the Christian life and helping that person develop spiritual disciplines. While Jesus could have reached the masses in His earthly ministry, He chose to devote the majority of His time to twelve men. He knew He needed to personally care for and form a small group of men who would be strong enough to do the same for others. In the end, this approach would multiply disciples, and reach the masses. In other words, Jesus has given the Church a mission statement: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

The majority of teenagers stop practicing their faith in their first year of college as the social activity and prevalent worldview that surrounds them comes in direct contradiction to the faith in which they were raised. Small group discipleship prepares them for this reality, as they will have developed spiritual disciplines to stay close to Jesus in His Church.
WHY PUT TEENAGERS IN SMALL GROUPS?

Small group discipleship is not a program—it is an apprenticeship in the Christian life. Therefore, the aim is to create the best environment for apprenticeship to take place.

Small Groups:

- provide an environment of trust and transparency so teens are known and loved
- connect teens with caring, faith-filled adults who can apprentice them in the disciplines of a disciple
- draw teens out of a peer-dominated paradigm and call them to maturity through relationships with adults
- strengthen catechesis through testimony, discussion, and faith sharing
- allow parents to demonstrate their support by hosting the small group in their homes

Conventional Youth Ministry:

- invites teenagers to participate in large group events and/or a classroom model of catechesis
- is aimed at winning students to embrace the faith by making church fun
- is not strategically partnering with parents so that faith sharing takes place in the home
- is not strategically mobilizing as many adults as possible to mentor teens
- lacks emphasis on apprenticing students in the disciplines of a disciple
What Is YDisciple?

YDisciple is a tool to multiply small group discipleship with teens in any parish. In order to mobilize as many adults as possible to facilitate small group discipleship with teens, YDisciple’s online platform delivers practical training, video studies, activity sessions, and parent resources. YDisciple meets the fundamental needs of teenagers through a model that is relational, relevant, and parent-driven.

CORE PRINCIPLES

Relational
YDisciple focuses on strengthening the key influential relationships in the lives of teenagers: parents, peers, and other caring adults. The best method of meeting the fundamental needs of teenagers is to create an environment where they are known and loved. That environment is a small group of friends, led by caring adult mentors, who trust one another and meet regularly in host homes. This principle is powerfully expressed in St. Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians: “So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

Relevant
A proven method of helping teenagers own their faith is to introduce content and thought-provoking discussion questions into a small group that has established trust and transparency. A transformative environment is one where testimony and faith sharing is practiced. The faith becomes relevant when teenagers see how it applies to their daily lives and they feel supported in living it.

Parent-Driven
No one is more motivated to meet the fundamental needs of teens than their parents. Once parents understand the power of small group discipleship, they can take initiative in building a group for their teen. In addition, parents are in the best position to help multiply small groups because of their interactions with other parents. YDisciple is an outreach model of youth ministry that meets teenagers on their own turf, and parents have the greatest access to this turf—the school and the home.
5 FUNDAMENTAL NEEDS OF TEENAGERS

1. The Need to Be Understood
The need to be understood is a great psychological need for us as human beings. Unfortunately, the majority of teenagers do not believe that adults understand them. When an adult takes a genuine interest in a teenager and seeks first to understand, that adult earns the right to be heard. If adults want to hand on the faith to teenagers, they must seek first to understand what is going on in their minds and hearts. Teenagers don't care how much we know until they know how much we care.

2. The Need to Belong
Teenagers are driven to meet the “need to belong” before higher growth needs like understanding and living the Christian faith. In fact, it is often the case that teenagers will compromise the morals in which they have been raised in order to belong somewhere. If adults don't help teenagers build healthy, life-giving relationships with one another, then teens will find a way to meet that need themselves. On the other hand, if adults create an environment where teens are known, loved, and cared for, they create an ideal environment for discipleship.

3. The Need to Be Transparent
Teenagers rarely have the freedom to be transparent today, especially with one another. It is too dangerous to be vulnerable in a peer-dominated world focused on image and popularity. Teens long for the opportunity to be transparent about their doubts, concerns, fears, insecurities, hopes, and dreams, and to have the confidence of knowing they will not be judged, but loved and supported. In fact, this is necessary in order for them to grow in self-awareness and self-esteem. A small group where trust has been established creates an environment where transparency can take place.

4. The Need to Engage in Critical Thinking About Faith and Life
Teens are transitioning from concrete thinking to abstract thinking and are able to conceptualize ideas such as love, justice, fairness, and truth. They are also capable of pondering the big questions in life such as: Is there a God? Do I need religion? Can I know God’s plan for my life? In addition, they are in the process of establishing independence and becoming their own person. Deep down they desire to be treated as adults and no longer want to be told what to do or what to believe. They are critically evaluating what they have been raised to believe and are not that interested in answers to questions they are not asking. Thought-provoking questions, lively discussion, dialogue, and freedom of expression engage teenagers in critical thinking.

5. The Need for Guidance
Teenagers need dialogue, collaboration, and friendship with adults in order to become adults themselves. Relationships with adults help them answer deep fundamental questions like: Am I lovable? Am I capable? What difference does my life make? They are naturally idealistic and desire to be challenged to greatness through the direction, encouragement, and support of caring adults. It is a well-known educational principle that young people will rise to the level of our expectations of them. Teenagers will give their lives to Jesus through the witness and encouragement of loving, faith-filled adults.
How to Start YDisciple in Your Parish

THREE STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTING YDISCIPLE

Parents have the greatest influence in the lives of their children. In fact, a father’s influence often determines whether or not his son or daughter will remain in the Church. However, because adolescents are establishing their independence as they mature, parents can greatly benefit from the help of other caring adults in forming their teenager. These adults mentor and provide the guidance necessary for a small group of teens to share life and faith with one another. These adults also serve to strengthen communication between parents and their teenager.

1. Empower Parents

In light of the irreplaceable role of parents, the parish should initially meet with them when implementing YDisciple. In this meeting, parents are given the vision of YDisciple and encouraged to take initiative in building a small group for their teenager. With input from their teen, they can invite other families to participate and potential mentors to lead the group.

2. Train Mentors

Once a group of parents have recruited two mentors to lead the small group for their teenagers, the parish should prepare the mentors with the training sessions provided by YDisciple.

3. Launch Small Groups

The initial commitment for the families is 6 sessions. The families are invited to take turns hosting the group for these sessions. In addition, the parents commit to using the “Parent Sheets” for each session to have meaningful follow up conversations with their teenager. Once the group has completed the “Follow Me” study, the families and mentors can evaluate if they want to continue with small group discipleship.
WHAT DOES A YDISCIPLE GROUP LOOK LIKE?

• 2 Adult Mentors, same gender as the teens, and not a parent of a teen in the group  
• 5–8 teens of the same gender  
• Teenagers should be as close in age as possible and preferably friends from the same school  
• Meet 2–4 times a month for approximately 90 minutes

Parents welcome everyone, provide snacks, and socialize for 15–20 minutes before allowing the group to have privacy for their meeting.

YDisciple advocates for building small groups of teens who already know each other. By starting with teens who are already friends and have common interests, you are able to build upon a foundation of trust already present. This is key to establishing confidentiality, transparency, and accountability. In addition, if teens are from the same class and school, they can begin integrating their faith into their daily life, through the support of their friends, as opposed to compartmentalizing their faith to an hour on Sunday. The question is often asked: “Does this strategy encourage cliques?” In fact, the opposite is the case. Cliques form due to the insecurities of teens. Through establishing a close brotherhood and sisterhood, the teens become more secure in who they are. This is key if we are to challenge them to reach out and encourage their peers.

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME OF THE YEAR TO START A YDISCIPLE GROUP?

YDisciple is not a program; it is a parent-driven process. The online platform allows a parish to train new Adult Mentors and start new groups at any time during the year. The parable of the mustard seed is the model for starting small groups—plant a seed and watch it multiply. In other words, it is better to launch small groups one at a time than to have a large-scale launch of groups. If you launch a group successfully, with the right teens and mentors and with parent support, they will become the catalyst for the multiplication of groups.
WHERE IS THE BEST PLACE FOR A YDISCIPLE GROUP TO MEET?

The short answer to that is wherever your group can meet comfortably and in an environment that fosters honest sharing. It must conform to the Safe Environment rules of your diocese. We have found that homes create an environment most conducive to meeting the needs of teens and engaging parents in their faith formation.

**Note on Safe Environment:**

A strong argument can be made that homes are a much safer environment for youth meetings than rooms in your parish. Engaged, observant parents create the safest environment for their teen and their friends. When parents host the meetings in their homes and provide snacks/drinks, they really get to know the Adult Mentors and the teens. Even when they give the small group privacy for their discussion, they are aware of where the group is at all times. In addition, they get to know the other parents whose teens are involved in the group. Perpetrators most often target lonely, isolated teens in organizations that serve youth. When parents drop their teens off, they do not necessarily know the adults and other teens. They have to trust that the adults in the church will know where their teen is at all times. They also have to trust that those teens are always supervised by at least two adults. In reality, there are many more scenarios of a “less controlled environment” with teens meeting at the church than a small group of teens meeting in homes.

**It is imperative that all current Safe Environment policies for your diocese are followed.**
Roles and Responsibilities

PASTOR

The Pastor is the shepherd and the mentors are the sheepdogs. In other words, it is the goal of the mentors to draw their group of teens and their families more deeply into the life and mission of the parish. As teens grow in their faith and the disciplines of a disciple, they will grow in their love and appreciation for the priesthood and their Pastor's leadership. It is recommended that the Pastor reach out to parents, especially dads, win them to small group discipleship, and invite them to take the lead in forming discipleship groups. In addition, the Pastor can offer counsel, affirmation, and formation to the mentors and parents. Finally, a great way the Pastor can establish his guidance and support is to actually lead the mentors through the first five small group sessions of Follow Me before they lead them with the teens. The get-to-know-you exercises, discussion questions, and faith sharing will strengthen his relationship with them.

PARISH COORDINATOR

A Parish Coordinator assists in recruiting, managing, and supporting parents and mentors. He or she ensures that each small group is set up for success. It is recommended that Parish Coordinators lead a small group themselves so that they can develop an expertise in this model of youth outreach. The time commitment for a Parish Coordinator varies, depending on the number of small groups and mentors being managed. When starting new discipleship groups, there is a need to find a Lead Parent. Once a Lead Parent has established a small group of teens with mentors, the Parish Coordinator ensures that all mentors go through the online training sessions (five 20-minute videos). They should ensure that all mentors, and potentially parents, go through the diocesan Safe Environment training specific to your diocese. After groups are started, Parish Coordinators simply need to follow up with their mentors periodically to encourage them and to offer any support they may need.

LEAD PARENT

The role of the Lead Parent (or Lead Parents) is to take the lead in organizing a small group, which includes their teen and their teen’s friends. They also identify and invite potential Adult Mentors for their teen's group. Once the small group is established, the Lead Parent can assist the mentor in creating the schedule and location of future small group meetings. It is recommended that the Lead Parent host the first small group meeting in their home.
ADULT MENTORS

The role of the Adult Mentor is to facilitate small group sessions using the YDisciple resources. It is helpful if the mentor takes time to prepare before each session by reviewing the Leader Guides and videos for the session. Adult Mentors are also responsible for communicating with the parents of the teens in their group and sending them the Parent Sheets for each session. An explanation of the role of the Adult Mentor can be found in the *Expectations of a Small Group Adult Mentor* handout.

PARENTS

Parents play the most important role in the spiritual formation of their children. They have the most time with their teens and therefore the most opportunities to discuss the faith and how it applies to their lives. A powerful engine for personal conversion for teens is when they see their parents admit their weaknesses, express their need for God’s mercy, and make efforts to grow in grace. This is why YDisciple provides resources for parents to grow and discuss matters of the faith with their teen. It is true that teenagers are in a developmental phase of becoming their own person and often question their parents' beliefs and values. This is why Adult Mentors are a great help to parents. That being said, a parent’s love and encouragement is what makes all the difference.
How to Use the YDisciple Resources

WEBSITE REGISTRATION
YDisciple is available at FORMED.org. The Parish Admin is responsible for distributing the Parish Code so that each Parent and Adult Mentor has access to the YDisciple Studies.

TRAINING RESOURCES
YDisciple provides online training sessions for the Parish Coordinator (one session) and for the Adults Mentors (five sessions). It is recommended that the Parish Coordinator and the Adult Mentors also go through the five Follow Me sessions to get a good understanding of the flow of the sessions.

We’ve designed these training videos to boost mentors’ confidence by helping them understand the vision of YDisciple and provide them with practical skills. Each of the five training sessions are about 20 minutes in length.

Here are the Adult Mentor training session topics:

1. **Understanding Teens:** One of the greatest obstacles to teenagers making a lifelong commitment to Jesus and His Church is their lack of meaningful relationships with caring and faithful adults. In order for adults to build relationships with teenagers, they need to understand them. This session focuses on the 5 fundamental needs of teens, perceptions to overcome, and best practices for engaging them in conversation about life and faith.

2. **The Art of Small Group Facilitation:** Teenagers are looking for a safe place where they feel like they belong and can be transparent. A small group can be an ideal environment for them to receive the affirmation and encouragement they need to consider the teachings of Jesus Christ and discuss how these teachings apply to their lives. Through the caring witness of an adult leader and support of peers, the faith is caught as much as it is taught.
3. **Partnering with Parents:** It is the responsibility of parents to disciple their teenagers. Because of the nature of adolescence, it is prudent for parents to enlist the help of other faithful adults in this most important task. Partnering with parents involves communicating frequently, empowering them with resources, allowing them to host meetings in their home, inviting them to coordinate social activities outside of the discipleship meetings, and inviting them to lead groups of their own.

4. **Launching a Successful Small Group:** There are practical needs to be met in order to set up a small group for success. These include: engaging parents, communicating the vision of small group discipleship, recruiting teens, arranging the ideal make-up (age, gender, affinity) of teens in small groups, ensuring compliance of diocesan Safe Environment policies, finding locations to meet, utilizing the Teen Sheets, and deciding when to use Activity sessions.

5. **Discipleship:** Jesus extends the invitation to each of us to accept Him as Lord and Savior. In order for Jesus to be our Savior, we need to understand and respond to the Gospel message. In order for Jesus to be our Lord, we need to understand and practice the spiritual disciplines of discipleship. Small group discipleship involves helping teens grow in their understanding and love of the faith as well as helping them grow in their practice of spiritual disciplines.

There’s also a Parish Coordinator training session:

**Starting YDisciple:** How do we measure success in youth ministry? The most important measure of success is whether a parish is forming youth into lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ. The pastoral and developmental needs of teens require more effort than what any parish program or parish staff member can provide. To disciple every teen in the parish, it is necessary to create an environment where many adults in the parish are mentoring small groups of teens. This training video gives the vision for YDisciple and the practical steps to get it started in your parish. The video covers implementation strategies, leader recruitment, practical steps for managing the ministry, and how the resource can be utilized to start a discipleship movement in your parish.

The Adult Mentor and Parish Coordinator Training is accessed by clicking on the Small Groups Start Here Program Icon.
STUDY SESSIONS

What Is the Format of YDisciple Studies?

Sessions are organized into studies. Each study has between four and six sessions, and each session takes around 90 minutes to complete. There are usually between two and five video scenes in each session.

There are three sections in each study session:

CONNECT: This section helps teens to disengage from the world they are coming from, be open to receive God’s word, and be present to others in the group. This generally includes some get-to-know-you activities as well as an opening prayer with Scripture.

DISCUSS: This section includes the video presentation of the content for the session along with well-crafted discussion questions.

COMMIT: This section helps encourage teens to apply the content of the session to their lives and asks them to commit to specific actions connected with the topic. This time closes with prayer.

It is best not to rush through discussion just to get through the videos. The discussion around the topic engages critical thinking and is most helpful for teens to take ownership of their faith. When teens are really engaged in discussion about the faith or moral issues, you can trust that the Holy Spirit is at work. In addition, because parents have access to the website, you can have your teens watch some videos on their own time at home.

How to Use the Study Sessions

Step 1: Start with the Follow Me study.

Each new discipleship group should begin with the Follow Me study, which is designed to establish trust, encourage open communication, and help teens (and their parents) to understand the value and the cost of making a commitment to follow Jesus. You’ll be asking them to commit to these first 6 sessions—for themselves and for each other.

Step 2: Download the print materials before each session.

When preparing for a session, download the Leader Guide, Teen Sheet, and Parent Sheet in advance. Watch the videos and read through the materials. Consider the discussion questions and give some thought to the conversations. Pray for the Holy Spirit to enter into your planning, your session, and the hearts of everyone involved.
An Overview of the Materials

**Leader Guide:** This step-by-step guide is for the Adult Mentor (small group leader) to use to facilitate each session.

**Teen/Participant Sheet:** This take-home reminder assists teens in developing disciplines during the week. Print one for each teen in advance and distribute at your session. It’s also downloadable for emailing.

**Parent Sheet:** This follow-up resource for the parents provides a summary of the session along with conversation starters for parents and teens. Print and distribute this, or send it as an email.

**Step 3:** Gather with your group in a home or other meeting place for your discipleship group session. Every session is 90 minutes and has three steps: Connect, Discuss, and Commit.

- **Connect:** Build community with conversation and activities.
- **Discuss:** Engage in critical thinking and discussion around the topic of study.
- **Commit:** Summarize, pray together, and encourage accountability.

**What’s Next?**

All groups start with the *Follow Me* sessions as they define what discipleship is and why discipleship groups are important. The doctrinal studies follow the framework given by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, so there is a systematic order in place. However, as the group grows in fellowship and communication, a topic of interest may surface that may need to be addressed with another study. This is the value of small group discipleship. Trust and transparency bring questions and interests to the surface, and these can be addressed at the most opportune time.

Take a look at the Study Sequence on the next page to see the suggested sequence of Studies. Work through the Study Sequence. If your groups have already used a particular study then simply go the next study on the list. We suggest you also add a Discipleship Activity every one to two months.
WEBSITE NAVIGATION

All of the studies are listed as Programs on FORMED.org. After clicking on a Study Icon you will find each Session. You will find the videos under the Session tab. You will find the Leader Guides, Parent and Teen/Participant Sheets under the Study Guides tab.

DISCIPLESHIP ACTIVITIES

Groups will want to engage in discipleship activities that reinforce the H.A.B.I.T.S. they have been learning in their small group. Discipleship activities can be selected from the Discipleship Activities Program and don't need to be done in any specific order. We recommend introducing a Discipleship Activity session every couple of months.

Should We Ever Plan Large Group Events?

Large group events are not necessary to disciple teenagers, but they can be of great help. While in most cases it would not be appropriate to have both genders in a discipleship group because of the confidential sharing that takes place, teens do want to mix with the opposite gender. YDisciple encourages small groups to combine for regular service opportunities, as service is one of the disciplines of a disciple.
Study Sequence

YDisciple Studies consist of 4-6 Sessions. Each Session takes around 90 minutes to complete. Within each of the Sessions there are usually between two and five scenes. While we are recommending that groups follow the order of studies presented below, flexibility of covering topics that come up within a group is key to meeting the needs of teens. This is a guideline, however, we think it is very important that each group starts with the 5 sessions of Follow Me and the Follow Me Activity. In addition to small group studies, groups will want to engage in activities that reinforce a Catholic way of life. Activities can be selected from the Activities Program and don’t need to be done in a specific order. For example, there are activity sessions that are community builders, social events, prayer experiences, and service projects. We recommend introducing an “activity” session every 4-6 weeks.

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