

Choosing a Coordinator of Youth Ministry

Twenty five years ago, leaders in ministry used to joke that to be a youth minister you only needed to be able to do three things: sit on the floor, play guitar and eat pizza. Other versions of the joke substituted; drive a van and read the Bible by candle light. Whether that was true or not, the criteria to be a Coordinator of Youth Ministry have certainly expanded beyond these stereotypical qualities.

How does a parish or Catholic high school choose a coordinator of its youth ministry?

Whether the parish is hiring a full time coordinator or selecting a volunteer, there are qualities and skills that any person coordinating youth ministry at the parish should model. The National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers identified five standards that are common to all lay ecclesial ministry positions including what they refer to as Youth Ministry Leaders. In choosing someone to coordinate youth ministry at your parish, these five standards should be the starting point for discussion among the selection team and in the actual interview. What are these five standards?

- Personal and Spiritual Maturity
- Lay Ecclesial Ministry Identity
- Catholic Theology
- Pastoral Praxis
- Professional Practice

Certainly it makes sense to expect that every lay ecclesial minister has a basic competence in each of these areas. But how do you measure such competence? When choosing a volunteer coordinator from the community, the community has the advantage of knowing the members and thus having a fairly good understanding of how the candidate matches up to these standards. But if the parish is hiring, often the applicants are not familiar to the interview team. So how does one begin to assess candidates for these positions? Of course, any interview should ask the candidate to speak about their previous experiences, but such narratives do not always reveal critical and essential issues. Here are ten key questions that will help an interview team begin to assess candidates using the five National Certification Standards.

1. Tell about how you came to recognize your call to work in youth ministry?
2. Offer a reflection on any portion of current events from the perspective of the gospels.
3. What have you done in the past year to continue in the formation of your faith?
4. What connection do you see between your work in youth ministry and mission of the global church?
5. When considering scripture, what is the most important message to carry to young people?
6. What experience have you had with planning and leading liturgical services?
7. What are the goals and principals of Catholic youth ministry, as set forth in *Renewing the Vision*?

8. What is your vision for adolescent catechesis?
9. What are some strategies that would help a youth minister do the work of an evangelist?
10. What are the pastoral care issues that are the most critical for adolescents today?ⁱ

Whether the search is for a full time paid coordinator or a volunteer coordinator, interview teams need to keep these basic qualifications in mind as they listen to those being interviewed:

- An understanding of youth culture, able to affirm what is good in the adolescent world
- Experience managing volunteers in small and larger tasks
- Successful experience of working with adolescents
- Catholic and able to model Catholic values and morals.
- Awareness of and ability to positively represent the teaching of the Catholic Church
- Ability to take direction from a supervisor and to work collaborative

Like the standards above, this simple list is easy to articulate but difficult to measure in an interview. If an interview team has not been able to hear about a candidate's ability in one or more of these areas, the team members must be ready to ask directly for the candidate to give examples.

- Give an example of something in the culture of today's adolescents that is worth affirming.
- Tell about a project where you were responsible for managing volunteers
- What has been your best experience of working with adolescents...your worst?
- Who is someone who has modeled Catholic values and morals for you?
- Are there any teachings of the Catholic Church that you could not represent to young people accurately and positively?
- Share a positive experience of supervision [where you were the supervisor or supervised]

When choosing a coordinator for your youth ministry for the parish, be familiar with the job description. Gather a team together for the interview that is diverse in age and role within the parish youth ministry program. Be clear about who has the final decision in the hiring. In parishes, it is ultimately the pastor's responsibility to hire which the interview committee recommends candidates to hire. Interview committees should have some basic answers to questions regarding salary, budget, benefits, and accountability.

Twenty-five years ago, pizza, guitars and vans were the criteria for selecting the parish youth minister. Today, the criteria seem less epic but much more to the point.

ⁱ Many of these questions are adapted from *Growing in Competency: A Self Assessment Tools for Youth Ministry Leader*, written and Catherine Becker and published by NFCYM.