

10 Things I Wish Someone Told Me Before I Became a Youth Minister



I recently posed a question on my Twitter and Facebook pages to a variety of youth ministers asking, “What things do you wish someone told you before you became a youth minister?” After receiving a variety of responses, it was evident that there were many recurring themes. For those of you who are thinking of becoming youth ministers, and even for some of you grizzly veterans who have seen one too many high school productions of “Grease,” here are 10 things I wish someone told me before I became a youth minister (with a little help from my friends):

1. Above all else, you must pray.

In order to be a great youth minister, you must believe what you teach. Now, that seems pretty obvious, but it’s amazing how many of us can tell our teens about the importance of prayer and not take time to do it ourselves. Without prayer, our ministry points to us and not to God, and this is the biggest mistake we can make. We must be people of prayer first, not just for our ministries, but for our own hearts.

2. Balance, balance, balance.

The most common response I received to this question was the phrase: “learn how to balance.” As youth ministers we not only have a responsibility to our ministry, we also have a responsibility to our own prayer life, family, friends, health, and more. So, get a calendar, a planner, or whatever it takes and setup a healthy schedule for your prayer, vocation, and ministry.

3. It’s not about what you know. It’s about how you live.

This statement is not an excuse to be theologically ignorant. As youth ministers it is vital for us to continue to grow in our knowledge of the faith. With that said, it’s even more important that we live it. Imagine if I told you all about the beauty of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but didn’t go on a regular basis. We must live out the faith we believe in no matter where we are or whom we’re with.

4. Take a public speaking class.

Speaking of theology, we can have all the knowledge of the world about the Catholic faith, but if we

don't know how to communicate it, then how effective can we be? Being able to speak in front of groups of people is a major part of being a youth minister. While most of the time, our audience will be teens, there may be other times when it's parents or other adults. Find some training in this area, whether at a local seminar, community college, or one of our Life Teen Training Conferences.

5. Get to know the whole parish.

When we become youth ministers, it's natural to think that the only people we need to connect with are teenagers. While this is the primary group we will minister to, it's important to remember that youth ministry is one part of a larger parish vision. Get to know the people who go to Daily Mass; they can be your best prayer warriors. Befriend the parish secretary; she can be your best advocate. Above all, seek to develop relationships with the parishioners, and listen more than you talk.

6. Dress for success.

As I travel around, I hear a lot of youth ministers say they want to be treated as a professional. If that's the case, then the solution is simple: be professional, especially in the way you dress. Does this mean you have to wear a suit and tie or can never wear a t-shirt and shorts? No. But be sure to consider the situation and dress accordingly.

7. It's not about how cool you are. It's about how you love.

Too many of us often feel like we have to know all the latest trends and slang in order to reach our teens. But quite honestly, the best way to minister to teens is to be yourself. God created you uniquely, and He called you to this because He wants you to use the gifts He's placed inside of you to love the teens and lead them closer to Him. So, why do we spend so much time trying to be someone else? Teens can spot a fake, and trust me, they will remember you more for the ways that you loved them than they will if you know why someone named Snooki is famous.

8. Confirmation is a Sacrament, not a crutch to hold up your Youth Ministry.

When you're asked to lead Confirmation preparation for high school teens along with the overall youth ministry, it can be tempting to want to use Confirmation to increase your youth group numbers. Most of the time this is because you can make things mandatory for Confirmation (like attending a Life Night), but this can be a huge mistake. I'm not saying that we shouldn't invite Confirmation candidates to participate in the overall Youth Ministry, but we need to be wary of making it mandatory.

9. You will face a lot of rejection. Don't give up.

If you like rejection, become a youth minister. I faced more rejection than Point Guards trying to shoot a basketball over Shaquille O'Neal. Teens will tell you they can't come because they have too much homework, they have a basketball game, their parents won't let them, or they just don't want to. You will face rejection, but you can never give up. Keep building relationships. Keep inviting. You never know when they will finally say "yes." After all, isn't that what God does for us?

10. It's about getting their soul to heaven, not their body to a Life Night.

We spend way too much time focusing on the numbers of teens that come to events, whether it's a Life Night, retreat, or something else. While we do desire them to be physically present, imagine what our Youth Ministry could look like if we cared even more for their souls. Instead of measuring numbers at a Life Night, begin looking at the numbers of teens who are attending Daily Mass, regularly seeking the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or spending time in prayer each day.



These are just 10 things I wish I knew before I became a youth minister. I can think of a lot more, and I'm sure you can too. So, what are they? Share them below. You never know how your comment could help a fellow youth minister.

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