Family-Size Your Youth Ministry
Family-Sizing Session Plan

• Why should we reach out to and involve parents and families in our faith formation/religious education/youth ministry programs?

• Best Practices for reaching parents and families of teens; partnering with them to develop a plan to share faith at home; and involving them in youth ministry/faith formation/religious education.

• Strategies to organize your ministry to respond to the greater demands of involving parents and families.

• Starting points - handouts and activities
Community – Not an Option in Youth Ministry

Find a partner, someone you didn’t come with or don’t know well, and introduce yourself in the following way:

- Share your name, your ministry role, and your parish affiliation
- Favorite family dish at Thanksgiving
- One way you shared faith in your family as a teenager at home
- One way you share faith in your family today
Obstacles to Family-Sizing Your Youth Ministry

Some obstacles include:

- “I don’t have enough budget to cover additional outreach to parents and families.”
- “I don’t have enough time to reach out to all of these people and still serve the teens assigned to me.”
- “I don’t know where to start!”
Obstacles to Family-Sizing Your Youth Ministry

- “I tried it before and it didn’t work.”
- “Teens won’t want to attend programs if parents participate.”
- Language and culture barriers
- “Isn’t that family ministry and not youth ministry?”
Obstacles to Family-Sizing Your Youth Ministry

What are the obstacles you face when you currently family-size your youth ministry?

Or

What are the obstacles you believe you will face when you family-size in the future?
The culture in American homes 50 years ago:

Children’s chance of growing up with both parents: 80%

Source: Kids Count Data

Divorce Rate 1 in 5
Source: Natl Center for Health Statistics
The culture in American churches 50 years ago:

Religion

70% of people feel religion is increasing its influence on American life.

Source: Gallup Poll
The culture in the American work place 50 years ago:

Parents at Work

40 hour work week

Less than 20% of children need day care due to parental work demands.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics
What did our daily lives used to look like in 1964?

Family Rituals

✓ Family Dinner
✓ Family Gatherings
✓ Little or no television (predominantly radio)
How did extended families used to stay connected?

Extended Family

- Lived close together
- More frequent contact

Source: US Census Bureau
What was the culture in the neighborhoods?

Neighbors

✓ Usually know neighbors well; mutual trust
What was the culture in the schools?

School

 ✓ Teachers are valued
 ✓ School prayer is allowed
 ✓ Top disciplinary problems:
   Gum, noise, dress code, littering, running in the halls

Source: Congressional Quarterly
What was the culture in the criminal justice system?

Juvenile Violent Crime

*16.1 incidents per 100,000

Source: Uniform Crime Report
What is the culture in our homes today?

Children’s chance of growing up with both parents: less than 50%

- Divorce rate 1 in 2
- Single-parent families increase: 350%

Source: National Center for Health Statistics
What is the culture in our workplace today?

Parents at Work

- 45-50 hour work week
- More than 60% of children need day care due to parental work demands

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics
What is the culture in our churches today?

Religion

- 60% of people feel religion is losing its influence on American life
- 90% feel the U.S. is slipping into moral decline

Source: Gallup Poll
What is the culture in our homes today?

Family Rituals

*Each week a school age child spends:
- 1.8 hours reading
- 5.6 hours doing homework
- 21 hours watching TV

Source: Learn to Discern

*Adults watch TV 15 hours weekly

Source: Time for Life

- TV Larger than life
- Computer games
- Internet
- Parents’ time w/kids:
  - 5 minutes w/ dad
  - 20 minutes w/ mom

Source: Natl Commission on Children
What is the culture in our extended families today?

Extended families:

- Live farther apart
- Less frequent contact and involvement

Source: US Census Bureau
What is the culture in our neighborhoods?

Fewer than half of American adults know most or all of their neighbors. When survey respondents were asked if they knew the names of the neighbors who live close to them, 19% of adults said they knew all of their neighbors. Another 24% said they knew most of their neighbors. This left the majority of American adults knowing only some (29%) or none (28%) of their neighbors by name.

- Pew Research, 2010
What is the culture in our schools today?

School

- Teachers’ moral voices are silenced
- Assaults on teachers up 700% since 1978
- Top disciplinary problems: drugs, alcohol, pregnancy, suicide, robbery, and assault

Source: Congressional Quarterly
What is the culture in our juvenile justice system?

Juvenile Violent Crime

- Up 500% from 1950’s
- Up 22% since 1990
- 75.8 incidents per 100,000

Source: Uniform Crime Report
The Shelter of Each Other traces the effects of our society’s “anti-family” way of life, where parents are overtaxed, children are under supervised, and technology is rapidly dictating how we interact. Mary Pipher illuminates how our families are suffering at the hands of shifting cultural norms. Drawing on the fascinating stories of families rich and poor, angry and despairing, religious and skeptical, Pipher clears a path to the strength and energy at the core of family life. The Shelter of Each Other is an impassioned call for us to gather our families in our arms and hold on to them for dear life.
Pope Francis:

-- "The perfect family doesn't exist, nor is there a perfect husband or a perfect wife, and let's not talk about the perfect mother-in-law! It's just us sinners." A healthy family life requires frequent use of three phrases: "May I? Thank you, and I'm sorry" and "never, never, never end the day without making peace." (Meeting with engaged couples, Feb. 14, 2014).
The National Study of Youth and Religion

Introduction to the NSYR


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True or False?

Teens find their parents’ religious beliefs and practices old and meaningless and want little to do with any of it.
Question 1: False

3 out of 4 teenagers consider their own beliefs and practices somewhat or very similar to their parents.

- 79% (RC 74%) say they are somewhat/very similar to their mother. (*Soul Searching*, p. 35)
- 72% (RC 70%) say they are somewhat/very similar to their father. (ibid.)
- Only 6% (RC 6%) consider their beliefs very different from their mother and only 11% (RC 13%) from their father. (ibid.)
- 19% of Catholic families never talk about religion or spiritual things, with 34% talking about it at least once a week. (ibid, p. 55)
True or false?

Faith is important to teens
and shapes their daily lives.
Question 2: True (but false)

- 84% of Catholic youth say it is
- somewhat (42%), very (31%), or extremely (11%) important in shaping their daily life.

(NFCYM Report, p. 34)
Question 2: True (but false)

According to Dr. Smith, “religion actually appears to operate much more as a taken-for-granted aspect of life, mostly situated in the background of everyday living, which becomes salient only under very specific conditions” (Soul Searching, p. 130).
True or False?

For Catholic youth, participation in youth group, religious education, or being a Catholic school student results in an increase in religious practices and a decrease in at-risk behaviors.
Question 3: True

- Catholic data revealed that participation did make a significant difference; see page 58 of the NFCYM report.

- According to Dr. Smith, “…we nevertheless observe sizable and significant differences in a variety of important life outcomes between more and less religious teenagers in the United States. Highly religious teenagers appear to be doing much better in life than less religious teenagers.”

*(Soul Searching, p. 263).*
True or False?

Having a full-time paid youth minister makes a significant difference in the religiosity of youth in those congregations.
According to Dr. Smith, “Religious congregations that prioritize ministry to youth and support for their parents, invest in trained and skilled youth group leaders, and make serious efforts to engage and teach adolescents seem much more likely to draw youth into their religious lives and to foster religious and spiritual maturity in their young members”

(Soul Searching, pp. 261-262).
True or false?

Teens have a solid knowledge of their faith and can articulate their basic beliefs about God and religion.
Question 5: False

According to Dr. Smith, “In our in-depth interviews with U.S. teenagers, we also found the vast majority of them to be incredibly inarticulate about their faith, their religious beliefs and practices, and its meaning or place in their lives (Soul Searching, p. 131).” “Catholic teenagers also tended to be particularly inarticulate about their faith (ibid., p. 132).”
True or false?

In comparison to other religious traditions, the Catholic Church was equal to or better in most variables measuring religiosity.
Question 6: False

Catholic teens scored 5-25 percentage points lower than their conservative, mainline, and black Protestant peers on a variety of religious beliefs, practices, experiences, commitments, and evaluations

(Soul Searching, p. 194)
Dr. Smith: “The jubilant, intense, exhausting, and inspiring (2003, NFCYM, Houston) conference reveals the great potential that the U.S. Catholic Church has for seriously engaging and forming its teenagers. But our research findings show that the Church has a long way to go to reach that immense potential. Getting from where the majority of U.S. Catholic teens currently are with regard to their religious faith and lives to achieving the huge religious potential that appears to exist for them would seem to require that the Church invest a great deal more attention, creativity, and institutional resources into its young members and therefore into its own life. Undeniably the future shape of the U.S. Catholic Church vitally depends on it.” (Soul Searching, p. 217)
True or false?

Parents’ religiosity is the single best predictor of their teen’s religiosity.
Question 7: True

- There is a correlation between parents’ religious practices and beliefs with their teenagers: 68% of youth that attend Mass more frequently discuss religion in the home more often (NFCYM Report, p. 59).

- “Parents are the most influential agents of catechesis for their children. They have a unique responsibility for the education of their children; they are the first educators, or catechists.” (National Directory for Catechesis, p. 23)
Question 7: True

“...the best social predictor, although not a guarantee, of what the religious and spiritual lives of youth will look like, is what the religious and spiritual lives of their parents do look like.”

(Soul Searching, p. 261).
What are you already doing with parents and families in your youth ministry?

“We started a Youth Mass once a month, so that families can come together at Mass in a youth friendly atmosphere. I know it’s not much but it’s a start, and it has been successful. We are using a program (Decision Point) that engages the parents by emailing them videos, and information on what their teens are doing in the classroom. We are also having a Living Rosary & Saint Parade on Wednesday before Halloween, held outside (weather permitting - last year it was inside). It’s for the whole family...Teens hosting this event for the families and younger children. We pray the rosary and then the younger children go trick or treating afterwards. The teens pass out candy, saint cards, and rosaries at the classroom doors. EVERYONE is encouraged to dress up as their favorite saint.”

-Renee O’Malley, St. John the Apostle Church, Fort Worth
What are you already doing with parents and families in your youth ministry?

“I am inviting more parents to come to youth group events. I am inviting parents to take ownership of certain parts of the events. I hold meetings with parents only (of the teens) and we go through the entire agenda first.”

- Rosie Lara, St. Thomas the Apostle Church, Fort Worth
What are you already doing with parents and families in your youth ministry?

“Parent Class on Confirmation at the Orientation, opportunities to get involved with their youth at YM events as chaperones, providing snacks and supplies, annual AWAKENING event (parish mission for the whole family), RCIA adapted to include the families, web site, email correspondence about what is going on in the classes, text messages, FeedingOurFaith.com cooking show and potlucks, family service opportunities.”

- Genni Sayers, Holy Family Church, Fort Worth
What are you already doing with parents and families in your youth ministry?

“We ask parents to attend gatherings and they help with food etc. A lot of times younger siblings come and want to be included. We will let them if it is age appropriate.”

- Barbara Weatherford, Our Lady of Mercy, Fort Worth
What are you already doing with parents and families in your youth ministry?
Offering indispensable advice, this authoritative guide explores how teachers, program leaders, coaches, and other youth workers can forge partnerships with families and encourage meaningful parental involvement. Inspirational stories and icebreaker suggestions are combined with fun activities and reproducible handouts, all designed to increase parental communication. Event planning, volunteer recruitment, and sustaining parental participation are concisely addressed as are the topics of appropriate conduct, helping young people through transitional periods, complimenting parents and children, and setting boundaries. This title includes a CD-ROM of more than 40 reproducible pages from the book.
Standards for Parent/Family Partnerships

Standard 1: Welcoming all families into the community

Families are active participants in the life of the parish/faith formation/religious education/youth ministry (pffreym), and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to pffreym staff, and to what teens are learning and doing in pffreym.”

Standards for Parent/Family Partnerships

Standard 2: Communicating effectively

Families and pffreym staff engage in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication about learning and faith development.

Standards for Parent/Family Partnerships

Standard 3: Supporting teen success

Families and pffreym staff continuously collaborate to support teens’ healthy personal and spiritual development and growth in their experience and understanding of the Catholic faith both at home and at church.

Collaborating home and at church will provide regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge of the faith and help them to develop the skills to share their faith with others.

Standards for Parent/Family Partnerships

Standard 4: Speaking up for every child

Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other teens, to ensure that all are treated fairly and have access to learning and faith development opportunities that will support their personal and spiritual development.

Standards for Parent/Family Partnerships

Standard 5: Sharing power

Families and pffreym staff are equal partners in decisions that affect teens and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs.

Standards for Parent/Family Partnerships

Standard 6: Staff collaborate with community members

Connect teens, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.

First Steps to Engage Parents and Families

- If you don’t already have a complete contact list of all families with teens (the ages you work with), request that list.

- Consider using the book *Engage Every Parent* as a resource.

- Set aside a planning session with your youth ministry team to have a conversation about engaging parents and families in youth ministry.
First Steps to Engage Parents and Families

- If the team is ready to move forward, and you decide to move forward, have a conversation with your pastor to make sure that he supports this effort.

- With your team, write your SMART Goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-Bound) for engaging parents and families in the coming year.

- Your SMART goals should include your plan for how you will develop your leadership in this effort.
First Steps to Engage Parents and Families

• Strong Catholic Families Strong Catholic Youth

• Consider developing a “Parent Engagement Team” made up of parents, teens, and a liaison from the youth ministry team. This team would develop the initial plan to engage parents and families and then serve as an advocacy bridge between families and their needs and youth ministry and its needs.

WHAT WILL YOUR FIRST STEP BE TO FAMILY-SIZE YOUR YOUTH MINISTRY?
Faith Permeates the Daily Life of Families

Several common in-home family activities continually surfaced in research:

- eating together, especially the power of Sunday meals and holidays
- praying: bedtime rituals and prayer, grace before meals, family Seder
- having family conversations; displaying sacred objects and religious images, especially the Bible
- celebrating holidays
- providing moral instruction
- engaging in family devotions and reading the Bible.

(wuthnow, x1)
5 Keys for Helping Families Develop Faith at Home

- Employ the “Four Keys” as the basis for helping congregations and families develop faith at home. To these Four Keys add one more family faith practice: the family meal.

- As you read and utilize these insights, be sure to recognize that there is one overriding theme that is woven through all of the research: the integration of faith and daily family life. To quote Diana Garland: “the daily activities of family life are the canvas for experiencing and sharing faith life with one another.”
5 Keys for Helping Families Develop Faith at Home

- Core Practice 1: Family Faith Conversations
- Core Practice 2: Family Devotions and Prayer
- Core Practice 3: Family Service
- Core Practice 4: Family Rituals and Traditions
- Core Practice 5: Family Meal

How can youth ministry support these Core Family Practices?
Ways to connect with families

Youth are growing in their autonomy and need their parents as much as ever.

To minister to youth in the midst of this paradox, we plan for ways to connect with families by:

- Communicating with parents
- Providing parents of adolescents with helpful programs and resources
- Considering the impact of youth ministry on families as we plan
- Providing gatherings for families of adolescents.

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Don’t Judge Parents!

“It is important not to judge parents who aren’t involved with their children in ways that you can easily observe, or in ways that you would like them to be. It’s also important not to compare relative levels of parent involvement within families. Each family deals with its own set of unique personal circumstances.”

Pope Francis: 
Joy of the Gospel

“We don’t live better when we flee, hide, refuse to share, stop giving and lock ourselves up in our own comforts. Such a life is nothing more than slow suicide.

We’ll grow old and wrinkled, and our faces will no longer transmit joy but only nostalgia, a melancholy which is not healthy. Sometimes these melancholy Christian faces have more in common with pickled peppers than the joy of having a beautiful life.”
Session Wrap Up

From the information discussed and shared during this session...

- What affirms you?
- What surprises you?
- What challenges you?
- What scares you?