

Youth Ministry Assessment

St. Matthew's, Austin

June 4-6, 2013

The following is an assessment and report over the youth ministry at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church. The report contains suggestions and recommendations for the youth ministry that was drawn from the online survey and listening groups with St. Matthew's parishioners. Christy Orman (*Youth Minister*) is the main facilitator of the 12-month plan and recommendations. These recommendations are flexible and can be adapted.

Culture and Scope

St. Matthew's is a loving and family-like community of 1,427 members. The Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) is 430 and there are around 40 total "reachable" youth on the rolls. The youth ministry meets weekly for Sunday school and Sunday evening "youth group" and has a weekly average attendance of 7 junior and senior high youth. The church's operating budget is \$1.2 million in which roughly \$16,800 is dedicated to youth ministry, which includes the youth minister's salary.

Rev. Merrill Wade (*Rector*, St. Matthew's), Christy Orman (*Youth Minister*), and Rev. Christine Faulstich (*Associate Rector*, St. Matthew's) reflected on the culture of the congregation. The following reflects the culture of the church.

- Loving and welcoming community that finds great value and importance in the formation of their children and youth.
- St. Matthew's has a rich 55-year history. Rev. Wade arrived and in his tenure thus far, he has established a healthy Episcopal identity at St. Matthew's.
- The culture of the youth ministry has struggled as the leaders of the youth ministry frequently changed. The most successful youth ministry at St. Matthew's was at a time when there was the greatest parental involvement.
- St. Matthew's is an aging congregation but there has been great growth in the family ministry in the past two years.

The following words were common reflections over the culture of the youth ministry.

- Inconsistent
- Huge potential
- Small
- Unknown
- Unstable

St. Matthew's recently conducted a Salt & Light Strategic Plan in 2012 where the church reviews all of its ministries and revisions its mission. Youth ministry received a great amount of comments, energy and anxiety.

Rev. Christine Faulstich invited Matt Blank to conduct a three-day youth ministry assessment, which included an online survey. Matt met with six listening groups including church leadership, youth ministry parents, current youth members, parents of smaller children, and adults not involved in the youth ministry. There were common themes expressed by all four groups. All groups discussed the need for a more consistent ministry that has a strong sense of their identity and communicates it well. All groups

talked about the small size of the current youth ministry and the need for outreach events and intergenerational activities. The groups emphasized the need for not only a dedicated youth minister but also a leadership team that provides sustainability to the ministry. All groups discussed the strong 3rd-5th grade group ("The Mix") and the large number of children in the church.

The cumulative youth ministry vision articulated by the people of St. Matthew's was "a safe place to give youth an opportunity to fellowship and build relationships with God and each other."

Division of Youth Expectations for Youth Ministry

A group of veteran youth ministers gathered in April 2012 to discuss the necessity of youth formation in the lives of our diocesan youth and churches. Here are a few of the findings that led to the formation of a Youth Development Program.

Formation

As a body of believers through baptism, all are called to be formed into the likeness of Christ, which means all people have an integral role in youth ministry. The formation of our youth and adults is imperative to a successful youth ministry program. This includes teaching congregations the importance and scope of youth ministry.

Leadership

Jesus taught us the way to bring others into the knowledge of him and raise up leaders in the church. As a church we are called to do the same. Youth, sponsors and parents need the tools for effective and Biblical discipleship.

Connection

Youth are living in a time where they yearn to be connected and a part of their communities. The church has in a large part failed to provide this piece of inclusivity of youth in their communities. Now is the time to develop ways to incorporate them into the life of the church.

Sustainability

When we focus on the above points we help grow the current ministry as well as vision for the future.

Diocese of Texas Youth Ministry Norms

1. What is the average ASA of youth ministry in the diocese?
Youth ASA is 13 youth per week (includes Sunday school and other youth programming). St. Matthew's falls below this statistic with 7 active youth weekly at Sunday school and youth group.
2. What is the average budget for youth ministry?
A benchmark budget should be \$1,000 per youth on the "reachable" youth rolls. This number accounts for all money designated for youth ministry (salary, benefits, youth ministry funds). St. Matthew's currently has \$16,800 dedicated for youth ministry. In terms of focusing simply on youth ministry knowing that there are at least 40 youth on the "reachable" rolls, St. Matthew's is falling \$23,200 underneath the ideal budget of \$40,000.
3. Staffing Decisions
A suggested benchmark is hiring a full-time youth minister for every 50 youth on the membership rolls. St. Matthew's currently has Christy Orman who coordinates the youth ministry for roughly 15 hours per week. Nick Puccio also serves as the youth intern for weekly youth group. The church is in a place where it needs a 25-30 hour-a-week part-time youth minister to grow. We should always be planning for the future and knowing that there is a large 3rd-5th grade group rising up, appropriate staffing decisions are essential for growth.
4. Sponsors and Volunteers
Discipleship is very important in youth ministries and one youth minister cannot minister effectively to every child. The best ratio is one committed adult sponsor for every 5-6 youth. The church needs to have a sponsor team that is consistently involved in the youth ministry throughout the year. It was noted that the most successful time in the youth ministry at St. Matthew's was when there was the highest parental involvement. Considers having parents volunteer and sponsor events more often.

Key Players for Growth

Rector

Youth Minister

Youth Council and Vestry

Emphasized in the strategic plan is the formation of a Youth Council that exists to support the Youth Minister in ministry and to follow through with the strategic plan. The council consists of invested adults, vestry members and youth who meet on a monthly basis to calendar events, empower others for ministry and follow the strategic plan and timeline.

Developer

Root Group Leader / Coaches

The Diocese of Texas is geographically separated into ten convocations. The Diocesan Youth Commission consists of members representing each convocation in the diocese. Each member of the commission is charged with leading convocational "Root Groups". These Root Group Leaders will serve also as coaches for youth ministers who recently underwent a three-day assessment. The Root Group Leaders will establish monthly meetings, phone calls or video calls with the youth minister to answer questions they have about the plan and timeline.

Youth Ministry Report and Timeline

Positives

Family-Like Community: Throughout all of the focus groups I heard over and over that St. Matthew's is place where all members feel like they belong. The family service was spoken about with great pride and support. This church values the importance of family.

Dedicated Leadership: Christy Orman is the first staff member solely dedicated to oversee the youth ministry in a few years. Clergy who were also assuming other roles in the church previously coordinated it. Having a dedicated youth minister shows the church's desire to prioritize youth formation and lays the platform for building a sustainable youth ministry.

Supported: After hearing the four listening groups it was very easy to hear that every person wants to see the youth ministry supported and sustained. There are many parents and other invested youth sponsors who want to help but they feel like they just do not know how. Addressing the challenges below will help parents and youth sponsors have a place to serve.

Challenges

Consistently Inconsistent: The youth ministry has a great deal of potential because it is essentially building from scratch. Create a skeletal structure for the next few years and stick to it (i.e. every year the youth group does youth group twice a month, a September Jr. High Lock-In, a March Sr. High Lock-In and a large mission trip). This creates traditions and something that the younger kids can look forward to and gain excitement. This also includes keeping the structure of youth group the same and never changing it (i.e. 20 min. dinner, 15 min. games, 15 min. lesson and discussion).

Communication: The congregation wants to know what is going on behind the doors of youth ministry. Communicate the calendar of events far ahead of time so that the church members know how to pray and support the ministry. Also, communicate with the youth on their playing field with Facebook, Twitter, and group texts. This will help with the creation of a volunteer and sponsor team.

Challenge in Obtaining the Critical Mass: People kept saying that the youth group is too small and they would never want to bring their friends. There is a challenge in obtaining the critical mass. This is the point where it feels like the individual is the "only one in the room." This speaks to the desire in creating more intergenerational events where many people are present as well as large outreach opportunities. Another solution to this problem is focusing on the idea that less is more. Consider having fewer, high-impact gatherings rather than weekly meetings. The gatherings that came up often in conversation were the Lock-In, VBS and palm cross folding.

Moving from Youth Group to Youth Ministry: Ministry is "missional". It is about going outside of our church walls and stepping outside of our offices. Youth ministry is about going to lunches, football games, dinners, etc. It is not all about Sunday school or Sunday night youth group. When St. Matthew's creates a core group of volunteers they can ensure that ministry will actually happen. This will also fix the problem of St. Matthew's youth ministry being "invisible" to the congregation because the congregation will be involved in ministry.

Tips and Recommendations

- Structure the next year (July 2013 – July 2014) using the outlined plan and timeline.
- Establish a Youth Council that meets monthly.
- Christy communicates (by phone, video call or in person) monthly with Mary Conkling to talk through the plan.

Overall Necessities

- Vision
 - Work with the youth council in the first monthly meeting to look through this plan and vision through the entire year for the youth ministry. Create a vision and scope for the ministry. I always suggest writing one, three and six year goals.
 - Have the Youth Council help in creating the calendar of events for the entire year. After the calendar is created, publicize it to the youth parents and the entire congregations so that they know how to support the youth ministry (very important for this church). Parish-wide events should always be added to the calendar first.
 - Don't OVERPLAN! Over planning can be detrimental. Once again, think a "few, high impact events."
 - Think with the mindset of "4 opportunities a month" – stick to it.
 - Include outreach and intergenerational events in the "4 opportunities a month"
 - Schedule out the volunteers/youth sponsors ahead of time.
- Operations
 - Create the proper forms (release of liability and covenants). For an example form, you can visit the diocesan website at www.epicenter.org/youth.
 - Continuously update contact information.
 - Create a communication strategy that fits St. Matthew's and the youth. Publicize all of the youth activities and calendar in the church's main avenues of communication.
 - Monthly emails
 - Quarterly mail-outs
 - Bulletin inserts
 - Social Media and mass texting
 - Keep attendance for all events. Contact youth who may have not shown up recently and do not worry about bothering them. You are doing your job as the youth minister.
 - Create a youth ministry folder (calendar, budget, compliance documents, game plans and attendance records).
- Leadership
 - Youth Council
 - This is a leadership group for the youth minister to lean on. Set clear expectations from the beginning that they are commissioned to vision and plan the youth ministry.
 - Volunteers and Sponsor Team
 - Equip and help them succeed. Be sure to set clear expectations from the beginning. Give them reading materials, train and empower them to step into their Baptismal vows and ministry.

Side-notes and Structural Change Suggestions

- **Youth Council and Volunteer Team**
 - The Youth Council's responsibilities are listed on page 5.
 - The Volunteer team could consist of 7-10 highly invested parents. Consider the parents in the 5th, 6th and 7th group. Their responsibilities are to communicate with 5-7 youth and serve as in an advisory role for Christy.
- Split the youth group into Jr. and Sr. High. Since we are focusing on the Jr. High-aged youth, leave them in the time slot in the evening for Sunday night youth group. The Sr. High could go out for lunch after church, which includes some discussion and reflection. Also, give the Sr. High the opportunity to serve as "youth sponsors" for the Jr. High. They could lead discussions, games or small group questions for the Jr. High group.
- Shift youth group to every 2nd and 4th Sunday. This will allow you to gain the critical mass necessary at a meeting. On the 1st and 3th Sundays spend that time throughout the week reaching the youth in more "missional" ways. (See page 5)
- Is there money to hire a musician for youth group?
- Christy takes on consistent hours

Basic Year-Long Youth Group Structure

- **Fall**
 - Youth Group every 2nd and 4th Sunday
 - September Jr. High Lock-In
 - November Family Retreat
 - Christmas youth group
- **Spring**
 - February Sr. High Lock-In
 - March BIG event
 - May Move-Up party
- **Summer**
 - Fun and Outreach

12-Month Checklist

<i>Month</i>	<i>Action</i>
July 2013 - PLANNING	Meet with Youth Council to vision and calendar the Fall semester. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a vision and 1, 3 and 6 year goals • Plan one big event for late-July • Plan one big school kick-off event for August • Include Family Retreat in November • Include Jr. Lock-In in September
	Send semester calendar to youth and youth parents. Put in ALL of the church publications.
	Create youth ministry folder (see page 5)
	Create communication strategy and stick to it for the semester.
	Create the volunteer and sponsor team. Begin to assign them to their 5-7 youth. Schedule a meeting with all of them for early August.
	Attend Missionpalooza
	Schedule a Mission Trip recap presentation during the Sunday school hour in August.
August 2013 – Equipping and Kick-Off!	Youth Council Meeting – Plan next month’s calendar and programming. Delegate and assign duties. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin planning a family retreat for November • Begin planning a Jr. High Lock-In for September
	Kick-off for the start of the NEW calendar!
	Meet with Youth Volunteer Team in early August. Talk about expectations and equip them to succeed.
	Hold a final mission trip recap presentation (during the Sunday school plenary?) to give testimonies and pictures about the mission trip. Tack on to this meeting a parent meeting. This is a good opportunity to answer all questions they may have at one time and show them a calendar for the next semester.
	2 nd and 4 rd YG model (see page 6)
	Happening/YES is Aug. 23-25
September 2013	Youth Council Meeting – Plan next month’s calendar and programming. Delegate and assign duties.
	Make sure all youth programming is advertised in church’s communication
	Jr. High Lock-In!
	2 nd and 4 rd YG model (see page 6)
October 2013	Youth Council Meeting – Plan next month’s calendar and programming. Delegate and assign duties.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan for the November family retreat
	Start planning a St. Matthew's youth mission trip
	2 nd and 4 rd YG model (see page 6)
November 2013	Youth Council Meeting – Plan next month's calendar and programming. Delegate and assign duties. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan Christmas party for next month
	Plan the mission trip details
	Family Retreat takes place
	2 nd and 4 rd YG model (see page 6)
	Happening/YES is Nov. 15-17
	YM Retreat is Nov. 6-8
December 2013	Youth Council Meeting – Plan next semester's calendar and programming. Delegate and assign duties. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include a BIG event for entire youth group in March Include the "moving up" event for the 5th graders Include a Sr. High Lock-In for February
	Meet with the youth sponsor team to reflect over the past semester and how the "communication system" could have been better.
	Send semester calendar to youth and youth parents. Put in ALL of the church publications.
	Midwinter is Dec. 28-30
	Most likely only one youth group this month and a Christmas party youth group.
January 2014	Youth Council Meeting – Plan next month's calendar and programming. Delegate and assign duties. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan Sr. High Lock-In
	Publicize the mission trip in all church publications
	2 nd and 4 rd YG model (see page 6)
February 2014	Youth Council Meeting – Plan next month's calendar and programming. Delegate and assign duties. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan BIG event for entire youth group
	Sr. High Lock-In takes place
	2 nd and 4 rd YG model (see page 6)
	Jr. High and Intermediate Retreats are Feb. 21-23
March 2014	Youth Council Meeting – Plan next month's calendar and programming. Delegate and assign duties.

	2 nd and 4 rd YG model (see page 6)
	Low month because of spring break!
	Plan, plan, plan mission trip details and keep parents in the loop
	Big Event takes place
April 2014	Youth Council Meeting – Plan next month’s calendar and programming. Delegate and assign duties. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan the moving up party for the 5th graders!
	Deadline to register for the mission trip!
	2 nd and 4 rd YG model (see page 6)
	Happening/YES are April 4-6
May 2014	Youth Council Meeting – Plan next summer calendar and programming. Delegate and assign duties. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> During the summer you could do a fun outing and an outreach outing every month. Youth Council will not meet during the summer
	Advertise the summer calendar with parents, youth and church
	2 nd and 4 rd YG model (see page 6)
	Moving up party for 5 th graders!
	Meet with Youth Volunteer team and reflect over the year. What needs to change? What can stay the same?
June 2014	One fun outing and one outreach outing.
July 2014	One fun outing
	Mission Trip
	Schedule a Mission Trip recap presentation during the Sunday school hour in August.
	Meet with youth council at end of July to plan the Fall semester. Advertise it to everyone on August 1.

