

TOOLBOX

TEN WAYS TO AFFIRM YOUR CORE MEMBERS

BY RANDY RAUS

Affirmation is one of the Life Teen Core Values. We need to affirm each other, especially those in our lives whom we couldn't do ministry without – our core members.

1. **Directly give genuine praise and encouragement to your core members** – This can come in the form of how much you appreciate them, value them in your life, or just how much you appreciate how they reach out to teens.

Steps to Meaningful Affirmation:

- Remove insincere phrases.
- Make eye contact.
- Make it about the other person.
- Be honest.
- Affirm the person directly.

2. **Encourage by mail** – Create a card ministry. Why not send a card in the mail to a core member, encouraging them and letting them know you are praying for them? Sending a card for no reason is especially meaningful in a time when handwritten notes are rare. How about a card detailing a favorite memory with that core member?
3. **Affirm on social media** – Following, saving, liking, reposting, and sharing someone's post is an encouragement. Rather than scroll past, bless the writer of the post with a like or share. A public post acknowledging one of your core members can go a long way in affirming them.
4. **Encourage by text** – In a world full of busyness, sometimes a supportive text (sometimes for no reason at all!) can be the most encouraging.
5. **Praise It Forward Cards** – Handwritten notes of thanks and affirmation are prized by core members and help affirm and recognize them for ways they have helped the team shine. They can post them at work or home on the refrigerator to lift their spirits and remind them of how others value them. You can even design your own kudos cards for your team. Make them fun with encouraging quotes, graphics, or snappy sayings.

- 6. Celebrations** – How does your core team celebrate success? Celebrations are a way to ensure you stop and are mindful of significant contributions or personal events on your team. Are you on the lookout for things that people on your team are doing well and that are important to celebrate?
- 7. Core dinner nights** – Plan a dinner for just your core team. Take them to a local restaurant and thank them for all they do for the teens and families at your parish. These nights build such a great community.
- 8. Core Awards** – Once a year, have a Teens' Choice Awards-style Life Night to honor the contributions of your core team. Have teens give input on core members and present individual and team awards for your core team.
- 9. Teen affirmation notes** – The next time you take teens on retreat, have them write core member affirmation notes to be included in the retreat session. Allowing the teens to learn how to affirm is a blessing for their life.
- 10. At Mass** – At the end of Mass, when you get up to invite the teens to Life Night, make special mention of your core team or individual core members and affirm them publicly in front of your parishioners. Core members are vital to our ministry, and who knows, publicly affirming them may encourage others to join the core team.

PRAYER AS A YOUTH MINISTER

BY MATT ZEMANEK

The last retreat I led was really, really difficult; the second it began, I wanted to leave. It was probably one of the best retreats I had ever led. The teens were great and had profound experiences encountering Jesus throughout the whole weekend, but I was tired, burnt out, and missed my family. Despite being surrounded by people having mountain-top experiences, I felt like I was in a spiritual desert.

Ministry is ironic because those of us who minister often find it difficult to be ministered to. We encourage and teach teens to pray, but how often do we pray outside of ministry? We tell others to keep holy the Sabbath, but we put in twelve-hour days on Sundays. Isn't it ironic?

Prayer is a relationship, but if we compared our prayer life to any other relationship, it would be glaringly apparent that something was wrong. Imagine that a husband and wife decide to become business partners, and suddenly, their entire lives, conversations, and interactions become about work. When we “go into business” with Jesus, we risk our entire relationship with Him becoming about the ministry we do and not focusing first on the love that we share.

To fix this, a couple would spend intentional time together apart from work. They would set boundaries so that work did not seep into their personal relationship. They would ensure that if the business suddenly went under, their relationship would still be intact. They would need to remember the passion and love they had for each other before the business began, just as we need to always let our passion for the Lord come first. Here are a few tips for ministers to stay faithful in prayer, so our prayer life can animate our ministry:

TAKE A SABBATH

Plan when you will have a Sabbath every week. No responsibility is so important that it circumvents the rest and worship that the Lord commands: “You shall keep the sabbath, because it is holy for you; every one who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.” (Exodus 31:14). Did you catch those consequences? Death or expulsion. We do not face those punishments directly, but if we do not take our Sabbath seriously, then ministry will kill our spirits and rob us of the time to be in our own community.

So, take a Sabbath. Take a day off where you get to spend time in intentional, personal prayer and leisure. Go for a walk. Spend time in silence with Jesus. Talk to God about your life outside of ministry. Yes, you read that right; you have a life outside of ministry! Devote time to be present and connected to your family and friends. No ministry, work, or ministry-related conversations are allowed.

SET BOUNDARIES

You are not the sole person responsible for walking with every teen. You do not need to be “on-call” 24/7. That is God’s job. Delegate responsibilities, use away messages, and turn off notifications for ministry-related apps when you are not on the clock. Do not bring “business” home into your personal time with Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, “pray constantly,” not “minister constantly.” The emails can be put off until tomorrow; prayer cannot.

How do you draw the line? Begin and end every workday in front of the tabernacle if you can, or at least in prayer. Offer the day’s work to the Lord when it begins: lay everything on your to-do list at His feet so that His will would be done in all of it. Return at the end of your day and leave everything you have worked on at His feet; do not take it home with you. Rather, give it all to the Lord because it is His already (CCC 874).

PRAY AWAY FROM MINISTRY

It can be hard to disconnect from ministry when we try to pray in the same spaces. Take a break from the parish or the Mass that you usually attend and periodically attend elsewhere so you can worship without being bombarded by questions or overdue paperwork.

Daily prayer is essential, but be sure some of that time in your daily prayer is not about ministry. Instead, focus on your own heart and come to your Father in Heaven as His child and not always as His laborer in the vineyard.

We often lead others in prayer, so take time in prayer where you can be led. Try practicing contemplative prayer; let the Lord speak and lead so you can do what you rarely get to do: receive. Spend time in Scripture and spiritual reading so that the Lord can speak to you, but do not start taking notes for your next talk. You need to be nourished, and not all of that food needs to be given away the moment you receive it. Let some things simply be for you.

Go have a date with the Lord. Spend time reconnecting, and remember: no talking business.

TEN JP II QUOTES TO INSPIRE YOUR MINISTRY

BY RACHEL PEÑATE

Take a look at the list of the most popular saints in the Catholic Church. What do you see? We see saints like St. John Bosco and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, who tirelessly dedicated their lives to Catholic education. We notice saints like St. Francis who sacrificed their entire livelihoods to take on a life of poverty. Then, we recognize saints like St. Cecilia and St. Maximilian Kolbe, who sacrificed their entire lives in honor of love and virtue.

Our most beloved saints are saints who exemplified heroism, hope, courage, and trust. We honor them because of these virtues and heroic deeds, but we don't remember them because all of their accomplishments were their own doing; rather, we honor them for their intense love of the Lord: an intense love that was lived out in miraculous ways.

Saint John Paul II is no exception to this list of extraordinary saints. He is remembered, honored, and beloved because of his intense love for the Lord. Saint John Paul II also happened to have a gift for the spoken and written word and gratefully the platform in which to project the Lord's message of hope to the masses, a message he often shared with the youth of our Church.

As you take a look at your ministry to teens, seek to revitalize the areas in which the Lord is calling you to find refreshment, and allow His words, through the ministry of St. John Paul II, to shape your work, ultimately (and foremostly) deepening your heart with love for He who deserves our highest praise.

For those who have trouble getting started: "The future starts today, not tomorrow."

For those who struggle with failure: "... never, ever give up on hope, never doubt, never tire, and never become discouraged. Be not afraid."

For those who fear the unknown: "Have no fear of moving into the unknown. Simply step out fearlessly knowing that I am with you, therefore no harm can befall you; all is very, very well. Do this in complete faith and confidence."

For those who need encouragement to meet teens in the culture: "The Gospel lives in conversation with culture, and if the Church holds back from the culture, the Gospel itself falls silent. Therefore, we

must be fearless in crossing the threshold of the communication and information revolution now taking place.”

For those who are discouraged by the continuous conflict in our world: “Do not be afraid to take a chance on peace, to teach peace, to live peace ... Peace will be the last word of history.”

For those who struggle with evangelization: “This is no time to be ashamed of the Gospel. It is the time to preach it from the rooftops. Do not be afraid to break out of comfortable and routine modes of living in order to take up the challenge of making Christ known in the modern metropolis. ”

For those who have lost sight of teens as souls to love rather than humans to convert: “A person’s rightful due is to be treated as an object of love, not as an object for use.”

For those who need encouragement to love well: “Do not be afraid, then, when love makes demands. Do not be afraid when love requires sacrifice.”

For those who need to remember hope: “The cross means there is no shipwreck without hope; there is no dark without dawn; nor storm without haven.”

For those who need to remember where the source of all love begins: “Let me go to the house of the Father.”

Post these quotes on your walls, memorize them, share them with your teens, or simply, just pray with them and hold them close to your heart. Whatever you do, “be not afraid” of this great task set before you in ministry. The Lord is holding you close, and St. John Paul II has so boldly proclaimed His words of peace.

St. John Paul II, pray for all of your youth ministers and the teens who will be impacted by their sacrifices in ministry. Amen!

CRAFTING A VISION, MISSION STATEMENT, AND GOALS

HOW TO SET A VISION FOR YOUR MINISTRY

When we use the word “vision,” we’re talking about the world as we want to see it. A vision pertains to the big picture. It encompasses the things that can be accomplished someday, but probably not anytime soon. To begin to formulate a vision statement, ask these questions:

- Who does my heart break for, and why does it break?
- What kind of world do I want to leave behind for those who come after me?
- How is God calling me to invite others into the Kingdom of Heaven today?

Write down your answers and begin to create several vision statements. Don’t worry about these being perfect — just keep writing several down. Then, take them to prayer. Look for a couple that really resonate with you, and then share them for further discernment with your pastor and team. This will help bring about confirmation of one particular vision for your ministry.

DETERMINING THE “WHO, WHAT, AND HOW” OF A MISSION STATEMENT

A mission statement moves us little by little to achieve our vision. It’s something that can be accomplished and that we want to accomplish. Mission statements are not meant to be static and unchanging but continually evolving and changing every couple of years (and sometimes every year). There are three key elements to a good mission statement – who, what, and how.

As you discern these three pieces, there are some questions you can ask that will help in your discernment:

Who

- What specific groups of teens have immediate needs that you can meet?
- Is this a large enough group to serve without being too broad?
- What makes this group unique, and how might it impact your methods?
- Do you have a pastoral mandate to serve a specific group of teens (such as, your parish priest requesting you specifically reach out to Catholic school teenagers)?

What

- What resources will you be using?
- Do these resources and methods suit the needs of your “who”?
- What is the impact you are hoping for from these methods or resources?

How

- What methods will you be using to implement the “what”?
- What style, frequency, and timeline will you have in place for this mission?
- What will you not be doing so you can make room for this mission?

SETTING THE RIGHT GOALS

Goals are what we use to measure our progress toward accomplishing our mission. When you set goals with your team, you may find that you have far more than two or three, especially if you are in your first year as a youth minister. This makes sense. After all, there is a lot for any youth minister to do! However, setting too many goals will require a lot of energy and increases our risk of failing to meet many (or all) of them.

There are three questions to ask that will help you narrow down your goals for ministry:

Will this goal have a high impact on the faith lives of teenagers if it is accomplished?

- Some goals are good, but may have a smaller impact on the faith lives of teenagers. Be honest with this question; we may have strong personal feelings about a particular goal but we need to look at the big picture.

What are we saying “no” to if we say “yes” to this goal?

- We all have limited time and energy, so when we say “yes” to something we are saying “no” to something else. If you pursue a particular goal it means you will need to say “no” to other initiatives. Are you willing to say “no” to those other areas?

Do we have the resources necessary to accomplish this goal in the time we want to accomplish it?

- Yes, we need to dream big and ask big things of God; we also need to exercise the virtue of prudence. Some goals are more achievable than others because we have the necessary resources to hit the ground running. This isn't a "make or break" requirement of a goal but could be important in helping narrow down your goals.

CREATING A CORE RECRUITMENT PLAN

Creating a core recruitment plan is key to calling forth everyone in the community who has a passion for serving teens. It is important to realize that recruiting a core team is a daily challenge. Recruitment will take place at your church and the grocery store. It will happen through life-long relationships and chance meetings with random strangers. Core recruitment is a constant part of your ministry, and you have to continually be on the lookout for people with the gifts and talents to minister to your teens.

Below is a step-by-step guide on recruiting core members. While it will need to be adapted to fit the dynamics of your parish, hopefully, this is a good starting place:

Step 1: Pray! God wants you to pray before you ask, “Do you want to be on the core team?” He wants you to pray for eyes to see the people He has already called to serve His church and His teens. He is calling them right now. He just needs you to find them and ask the question. You could make the best core recruitment plan in history, make the best video, or have a teen give the best testimony, but unless you pray, it won’t make a difference. So begin on your knees listening to who God is calling to lead His teens closer to Him. Ask others to join you in praying for the potential core members as well.

Step 2: Sit down with your current core team or pastor and decide on a specific plan of action to recruit core members. Some suggestions include having an information table after Mass, reaching out to local college campus ministry centers, identifying individuals in the parish and extending a personal invitation, sending out an advertisement in the bulletin, etc. Make a commitment to two or three ideas to maximize the people you reach.

Step 3: Work with the pastor to set a weekend where you will speak at all the Masses annually. Whether you are starting Life Teen or you have been doing Life Teen for ten years, you will want to share the ministry with the community. This is called advocacy and it is the most misunderstood aspect of youth ministry. The more you advocate for your teens, the more the parish will listen and respond to their needs.

Step 4: Host a Life Teen core information night for people interested in serving on the core team. At the end of the night, ask them to prayerfully discern this ministry and tell them you will be in touch to schedule a one-on-one interview.

Step 5: Schedule one-on-one interviews with each potential core member. This is where you discover more about them personally and spiritually. This will give you vital information to discern if they are right for this ministry. You don't have to accept everyone, and God will direct you in this decision.

Step 6: Have new core members attend any diocesan certifications and safe environment training necessary for volunteers with minors.

Step 7: Train your new core members in the Life Teen basics. Purchase a "Core Handbook" for each core member so they understand all aspects of this ministry. Life Support and Edge Support include periodic training materials to assist with ongoing core training.

Step 8: Ask your pastor to bless and commission your core team at Mass.

SAMPLE CORE APPLICATION

- Applicants should possess the following qualities: a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, an unconditional love for teenagers, a love for the Catholic Church, regular participation in Sunday worship, a personal prayer life, freedom from serious sin, regular reading of Scripture, and openness to using the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- Applicants must be open to training and completing all background checks and requirements set forth by the diocese.
- Applicants must continue to possess the qualities mentioned above throughout their commitment. They are free to terminate their relationship as a core team member. At the same time, the ministry of Life Teen retains the option to ask them to step out of this ministry.

APPLICANT'S INFORMATION

Last Name First Name MI

Current Address _____

City _____ State/Province _____ Zip/Postal Code _____

Cell phone _____ E-mail: _____

Date of Birth ____/____/____ Age _____ Gender _____

EDUCATION

Please check all that apply and fill in the requested information.

I graduated from college. _____ (College)

Presently, I am in college. _____ (College and class)

I did not attend college.

I graduated from high school in _____ (year)

EMPLOYMENT

Business name _____ Phone number _____

Job title _____ Your duties _____

Please document any other work-related trades or talents. (construction, public speaking, social media communications, street evangelist, etc.)

VOLUNTEER HISTORY

Please document the last two volunteer positions beginning with your most recent volunteer service.

A. Organization's name _____ Phone number _____

Your duties _____

Frequency of involvement (e.g. once a month) _____

Starting date: ____/____/____ Ending date: ____/____/____

Reason for leaving _____

B. Organization's name _____ Phone number _____

Your duties _____

Frequency of involvement (e.g. once a month) _____

Starting date: ____/____/____ Ending date: ____/____/____

Reason for leaving _____

DIOCESAN/PARISH INVOLVEMENT

Please check all that apply to you and fill in the requested information. Leave those choices that do not apply blank.

I have been a member of _____ parish for _____ years/months.

I have worked or volunteered at _____ parish.

I have...

taught or assisted in a religious education program in my home parish/another parish.

(Please circle one or both.)

assisted in a youth ministry/Life Teen program in my post-high school years.

served as a lector, Eucharistic minister, altar server, and/or choir member at a parish.

served in a parish or diocese in other capacities (coordinated or assisted with the parish

festival, assisted in the parish or diocesan office, etc.): _____. (Please indicate how you served.)

How often do you attend Mass?

Daily Weekly Monthly Rarely Never

AVAILABILITY

Please list any activities or commitments that might prohibit you from being available on Sunday nights or weekend retreats. Please list the dates and times of these commitments.

CATHOLIC/SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Please check all that apply to you and fill in the requested information.

I am baptized.

I was confirmed in the Catholic Church at the age of _____.

For the past 12 months, I have met my obligation of attending Sunday liturgy and Holy Days of obligation.

I converted to Catholicism at the age of _____ from the _____ faith.

I attended a Catholic school in grade(s) _____.

I attended a Catholic college/university for _____ year(s).

Other than in school, I attended religious education classes in grade(s) _____.

As a middle school or high school student, I participated in a Catholic youth ministry program in grade(s) _____.

List additional religious formation you received (for example, RENEW, RCIA, RCIT, a non-Catholic but Christian education, a non-Catholic but Christian youth ministry program, Campus Crusade, Young Life, etc.).

Since you have been out of high school, have you participated in any bible studies, religious education classes, Christian fellowship groups, etc.? Please elaborate.

PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL HISTORY

Write a brief testimony about how you have come into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Include the sacraments that you have received:

Describe three major ways in which you have grown in your spiritual journey.

How would you describe your spiritual journey right now?

What accountability do you currently have in your spiritual journey?

What do you do when you have a conflict with someone? How do you handle confrontation?

Are there any special issues or concerns in your life that would impact your commitment and involvement in the youth ministry? (relationships, other commitments, etc.)

What spiritual gifts do you feel you have, and how would you like to use them in our program?

Why do you want to be involved in youth ministry?

What are some of your expectations of our program, the Life Teen staff, and the parish staff?

SAFE ENVIRONMENT

In ministering to teens, we believe it is our responsibility to seek ministers who are able to provide healthy, safe, and spiritually sound ministry. You will need to complete the diocesan background checks and Safe Environment training in order to minister to teens. All forms and class times will be provided for you.

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I, the undersigned, give my authorization to release any and all records or information relating to working with minors. The parish staff may contact my references and appropriate government agencies as deemed necessary in order to verify my suitability as a minister to youth. I understand that the personal information in this application will be held confidential by the professional parish staff.

Signature

Today's date

GUIDE FOR CORE MEMBER INTERVIEWS

Your efforts and commitment to recruitment are working! You've found potential core members and are now ready to interview them to see if they will be a great fit for your Life Teen, Edge, or Purpose ministry. So here are the next steps:

- 1. Make an appointment.** To respect the time of the interested individual, make a dedicated appointment to introduce yourself and discuss the ministry in greater detail. Consider inviting another core member, parent, or staff member to join you.
- 2. Have a conversation.** Create a hospitable and welcoming space for the discussion and offer water, tea, or coffee. Invite the candidate to start your time together with a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to guide your conversation. Get to know the potential core member's interest in ministering to teens, and take notes so you can reference them later. Here are some sample questions to facilitate the conversation:
 - What have you done for fun lately?
 - Have you read any good books or heard any exciting podcasts in the last six months?
 - What activities, hobbies, or interests do you have?
 - What has sparked your interest in ministering to teens?
 - Tell me about your family.
 - Share with me a bit about your faith journey.
 - Tell me a bit about some ways you have participated in the parish.
 - Tell me why you think people need a relationship with Jesus.
 - What is your availability to be present to the needs of this ministry?
- 3. Detail the core team commitment, role, and expectations.**
- 4. Invite the potential core member to fill out paperwork** if it seems like a good fit. Provide a deadline for the completion of each of these tasks:
 - Fill out the intake forms necessary for parish volunteers.
 - Complete background check and diocesan Safe Environment requirements.

- Complete and return a Volunteer Code of Conduct.

5. Discuss next steps for training, meeting additional core members, and visiting an upcoming Life Night, Edge Night, or Purpose Confirmation session, pending Safe Environment and background check clearance.

FUN BONUS IDEAS!

- Invite your new core member to create a short two-minute video introducing themselves to the core team, teenagers, and parents.
- Share a short bio and picture to introduce them to the parish via the bulletin, social media, email, or other options.
- Compile a list of your new core member's "favorites" and invite the core team or parent ministry to help welcome them to their first Life Night, Edge Night, or Purpose session!

*Not every potential core member will be a good fit for youth ministry. The interview process is intended to help you discern compatibility. If an applicant is not a good fit, help them determine another ministry in the parish better suited to their skills and interests.

SAMPLE CORE MEMBER COVENANT

I, _____, am honored to respond to my baptismal call by serving in this Life Teen ministry. Life Teen is a Eucharist-centered, relational ministry striving to lead teens closer to Christ. We serve teens by building Christian friendships and living as disciples of Jesus Christ. I understand that much is asked of me. I accept this calling and commit to the following:

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND THE CHURCH

- I will develop my personal relationship with God through daily prayer, Scripture study, and Mass. I understand that Life Teen ministry is sometimes challenging, and I will succeed by the grace of God through prayer.
- I will abide by the teachings of the Catholic Church. Because I am a representative of the Church, I will actively study to understand the teachings of the Church, especially those I struggle with. I will pray for wisdom and obedience in seeking the truth. If a teen shares a Catholic teaching concern with me, I will invite them to explore the Catholic teaching with me and involve the youth minister or priest when needed.
- I will actively seek opportunities to pray with friends, teens, and other core members.
- I will frequent the Sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation.

As a core member, I understand that I am called to live a Christ-like life above and beyond my peer group. Core members make sacrifices because of our love for God and our desire to serve teens:

- I will not use drugs, get drunk, or drink beyond the legal limit to drive safely.
- I will not smoke or vape at any Life Teen function and will never smoke with teens.
- I will not promote or appear to promote substance use to teens or on social media.
- I will guard the influences I allow in my life, including media consumption, the language I use, and my conversations — avoiding gossip, slander, and scandal.

RELATIONSHIP WITH CORE MEMBERS

- I will develop Christian relationships with all our core team members, knowing the teens will model the relationships they see and experience with the core. I am committed to forming relationships characterized by compassion, patience, forgiveness, reconciliation, service, and charity.
- I will seek social opportunities with core members — especially core I do not know well.
- I will intentionally be welcoming to potential core members. I will introduce myself to new people and invite them to participate with me in ministering to teens.
- I understand the importance of our core functioning as a unified team. If I have a conflict with another core member, I will address that core member individually, giving them the benefit of the doubt. If I cannot resolve the conflict one-on-one, I will bring my concern to the youth minister.
- If I cannot attend a meeting or run late, I will inform the youth minister immediately.
- I will make every effort to attend spiritual and social gatherings for the core team, including training and retreats.

RELATIONSHIP WITH TEENAGERS

- I will develop Christian relationships with high school teenagers. All my relationships with teens will be Christ-centered and above reproach. I will follow all diocesan policies regarding teen ministry, including social media requirements. I will remain compliant with Safe Environment policies.
- I will make outreach to new teens a priority. I will develop new relationships with teens and foster established ones. I will support socially competent teens and socially anxious teens. I accept my role as part of a team. I acknowledge that I will connect with certain teens. Where I do not connect with a teen, another core member will.
- I will learn, understand, and follow mandatory reporting laws for crisis intervention. I will immediately involve the youth minister if I need help responding to a situation. If a teen discloses they or someone else may be in danger, I will inform the teen of my obligation to tell the youth minister and do so right away.
- At youth sessions, my focus will be to lead teens closer to Christ. I understand this is not the time to catch up with old friends, past teens, or other core members.

LIFE NIGHTS

Life Nights provide a safe environment for teens to explore their faith, grow in community, and fall more deeply in love with Christ. It is vital for core members to commit time and energy to these sessions.

- I will do my best to attend every Life Night and be a team player.
- I will help teens understand the expectation to arrive on time and stay through the entire Life Night.
- After the Life Night, I will mingle with teens and introduce myself to those I don't know. I will address teens who look disconnected or alone. I will help clean up after each Life Night.

DURING THE WEEK

I understand that my primary function is reaching out to teens and letting them know they matter. The teens not at church need me more than those at church.

- I will pray for the teens in my small group.
- I will invite teens to Life Nights, especially those who do not regularly attend.

DISCIPLINE

Disciplining teens is one of the most difficult things we do. The best scenario is to lean on an established relationship. Yet, some situations require extra patience and commitment.

- I will do my best as a representative of the Church to redirect the energy of the teen(s) with charity. When I cannot accomplish this successfully or if I become frustrated or irritated with a teenager, I will involve the youth minister to help with behavior management.

RETREATS

- I understand my commitment to core includes serving on teen retreats, which may involve taking a day off work and attending additional meetings. When I cannot arrange my schedule to serve on retreat, I will provide advance notice to the youth minister as early as possible.

In response to my baptismal call, I commit to serving teens as a core member for the coming academic year. I will review my commitment with the youth minister before renewing the following year. If my ability to meet my commitment changes, I will meet with the youth minister to discuss my position.

Signature

Today's date

HOW TO BE A GREAT CORE MEMBER

What does a “great” core member look like?

Polished, eloquent, charming, never makes a mistake?

Nope! Those are answers the world would give you. As core members, it’s not so much about how we look; it’s about how we act. Put simply, a “great” core member acts like Jesus.

Here are six key ways to grow in our ability to emulate Christ:

- 1. Take Initiative.** Every youth leader is hopeful that core members will take the initiative and care for the areas of ministry that need the most help. This means not waiting to be asked, but proactively approaching your youth minister with eagerness to know what more you can be doing. Or better yet, looking for obvious areas that need someone to step up in and start helping. Remember: sometimes, it isn’t the glamorous parts of ministry that need help. It can be as simple as staying the extra 15 minutes at the end of the Life/Edge Night to make sure the sound equipment is put back in place without being asked to do it.
- 2. Keep Promises.** If you say you are going to be there on time, be there on time. If you are working on a talk or video and have committed to making it amazing — make it amazing. If you tell a teen you will meet them at Mass, meet them at Mass. The great core members keep promises.
- 3. Learn Names.** Knowing the names of teens and parents means that you are engaged with your parish community. Not learning names might translate as an attitude of uncaring and lack of investment.
- 4. Make Their Day.** As a core member, teens look up to you. Stopping by a teen’s track meet after school, sharing a word of encouragement after a teen shared at Life/Edge Night, or simply remembering a birthday can make a teen’s day. Remember, you have the unique ability to make someone’s day just by being their core member. Don’t miss out on this opportunity!

- 5. Encourage, Affirm, and Give Hope.** What conversations do you remember most from your youth that have continued to inspire you to this day? It's very likely they were encouraging, offered affirmation of some kind, or had given you hope. As a core member, you are uniquely positioned to encourage these types of hope-filled conversations with teens every time you meet!

- 6. Pray For and With Teens.** Great core members are committed to praying for teens and praying with teens. In a crisis, teens will always seek out the core members who really take intercessory prayer seriously. Make sure that you not only pray with and intercede for the teens but that you fully participate in Mass, Adoration, closing prayers, and Life Nights.

HOW TO SPARK SMALL TALK

These conversation starters are sure to get the teens talking. To keep the conversation going, take a genuine interest in the high schoolers, learn their names, ask follow-up questions, really listen, and take your conversation cues from their responses. Try a few at the next Life Night.

GENERAL TOPICS

- Is this your first time at Life Teen? Do you recognize any kids from your school?
- Read anything good lately?
- Who's on your Spotify/Apple Music most-played right now?
- What are your weekend plans?
- What do you hope we do at Life Teen?
- What would you choose if you could only wear one brand of shoes for the rest of your life?
- If you could make one rule for the whole world, what would it be?
- What famous person would you choose to be a core member at Life Teen? Why?

FOR THE EXTROVERT

- What's your most surprising subject in school?
- If you could travel anywhere, where would you go?
- How would the country be different if a high schooler was in charge?
- What is your favorite talent?
- Is there a hobby you've always wanted to try?

FOR THE INTROVERT

- What do you like watching lately?
- Should pineapple be allowed on pizza?
- If you could have any animal as a pet, what would it be?
- What would you do if you were in charge of Life Teen for ten minutes?
- What subject do you wish everyone would learn more about?

CALENDAR-RELATED

- How will you spend the long weekend?
- What makes an awesome Halloween party theme?
- What's your favorite food on the Thanksgiving table?
- If you could rid the world of one Christmas decoration, what would it be?
- What gift are you most looking forward to someone opening this Christmas?
- Do you think New Year's resolutions work?
- What do you wish your teachers would resolve to do in the New Year?
- Have you thought about what you will give up for Lent?
- What's the best spring break activity?
- What sport should be included in the Olympics that currently is not?
- What does your ideal summer break look like?

20 TIPS FOR BETTER RELATIONAL MINISTRY

If you talk to anyone who has been involved in youth ministry, they will generally agree on one thing — it is all about relationships! No matter how dynamic your programming, how “spot-on” your catechesis, or how incredible your core team is, if you do not have a relationship with the teens in your program, none of it will matter.

But with our crazy schedules and limited time, how do we go about starting and building Christ-centered relationships with our teens? Relational ministry can, and should, be a diverse and inclusive part of your ministry. Here are 20 simple and quick tips to grow your relational ministry:

Be Present. At Life/Edge Nights, be present both physically and emotionally. This is where you make the initial connections with teens.

Send a Digital Invite. Send out a weekly email (or social media post) personally inviting teens to Life/Edge Nights and respond to teens who get back to you. This can start with your small group, but does not need to be limited to them! (Before communicating, make sure you know the Safe Environment Policies of your particular diocese.)

Invite in Person. Personally invite teens to Life/Edge Nights when you see them before or after Sunday Mass. The power of the personal invitation cannot be overestimated!

Reach Out. Follow up with teens who have previously shared a struggle or accomplishment with you. Reaching out only takes a minute and shows them that you listen and remember when they share.

Get to Mass Early. Greet teens when you arrive and check in on them. This could be as simple as asking how their week was or about an upcoming game or test. Simply touching base with them and letting teens know you are happy they are there is Powerful.

Meet the Parents. Introduce yourself to the teens’ parents and get to know them a little — they will be more likely to trust you with their child if they know you.

Be Social. Make use of the time at the start of sessions to gather. It is easy and tempting to stick to the core members and teens you are closest to — but seek out the ones on the edges who are alone and you don’t know as well.

Give Your Undivided Attention. When a teen is sharing, look them in the eyes, focus on them, and show them through your actions that you care. This is not the time to text, interrupt, or start conversations with other teens or adults.

Share Without Burdening. It is OK to share details of your life (what you are interested in, what you did last weekend or for vacation, favorite bands, teams) and even to share elements of your personal faith journey. Just be careful not to share too personally. It is not the teen's job to carry our stresses, worries, or fears.

Ask Follow-Up Questions. Conversation starters are great when getting to know someone, but don't stop there! Ask follow-up questions that draw teens deeper into the conversation.

Be Accountable. If you say you are going to email, email. If you say you are going to be somewhere, be there. And if you can't — communicate it ahead of time.

Follow Up. If we ask a teen to do something or say we will do something, we need to follow up. For example, if you challenge a teen to go to Confession, check back to see if they did it.

Encourage Parish Participation. Invite teens to go to Confession, daily Mass, or a special event at the church. These are great ways to build relationships.

Post "Drop-In" Hours. You can stay for ten minutes or three hours, but seeing your face in the youth room means a lot to them.

Find Common Interests. Finding things you have in common with the teens (books, sports, music, hobbies) gives you a foundation to build on.

Support Teens Outside of Parish Events. Plays, sporting events, performances, and concerts are all great ways to be present and build relationships away from the walls of the church. We sometimes underestimate the value of this — because, a lot of times, we don't get to talk to the teens at the actual event — but let them know you were there the next time you see them, it goes farther than you realize.

Be Present at Parish Events. Go to some non-youth ministry events at the church from time to time, and you will be amazed at how many teens you will run into. Take advantage of this opportunity to say "Hi."

Host Small Group Events. This can be either with your small group or just with a group of teens who share a common interest. Online Gaming events are a great example of this, but it can be as simple as sending a message inviting people to ice cream on a Sunday afternoon. (Ensuring, as always, that safe environment criteria is met.)

Attend an Event Together. Find a local sporting or music event and gather a group to go together. This gives you a chance to coordinate a relationship-building opportunity but takes the pressure off. Instead of spending an hour worrying about what to discuss, sharing an experience will naturally lend itself to conversation surrounding the event.

Visit Teens at Work. If you know a teen who works at Starbucks, McDonald's, or a store you like, find out when they will be there and drop by! You make an impact even if you are only there for five minutes.

Doing good relational ministry does add another item to your already packed agenda, but when it is done right and with a joyful spirit, it doesn't have to be an overwhelming undertaking. The fruits that it will yield for your teens and your program are beyond measure.

THE SIX CS OF RELATIONAL MINISTRY

Whether they openly share about their lives or stick to the edge of the youth room, hoping to remain unseen, every teen desires and benefits from positive relationships. Relational ministry is foundational to building community in youth ministry and accompanying teens as disciples.

The Six Cs of Relational Ministry cover the essential practices for relational ministry and how to effectively engage in these discipleship-forming relationships with teens. Keep reading to better understand the progression and reach of each level in relational ministry.

CONTACT

Involves all teenagers

The first level of relational ministry is Contact. This step applies to all teenagers attending the youth ministry program. Core members are encouraged to have contact with teen participants regardless of how well the core member already knows the teenager. Contact involves seeing the teens and letting them know their presence is valued. Core members can express their pleasure at the involvement or attendance of the teens.

Contact Steps:

- Introduce yourself. Don't wait for the teen to initiate the conversation. It can be scary being a teen at youth group. It is easier for you to reach out to the teen than for the teen to reach out to you. A simple conversation can change a teen's whole perspective on youth group.
- Ask the teen's name and remember it.
- Be yourself. Teens look for relatability in adults, but they don't expect you to behave like a teenager. Authenticity is essential. You don't have to use the most hip vocabulary or know the most up-to-date pop culture facts for teens to know that you love and care for them.

CONNECT

Involves most teenagers

Core members are encouraged to have contact with all teen participants and to connect with most. Contact leads to connection. Not every core member will connect with every teenager, and this level of relational ministry acknowledges that fact. The goal is for every teenage participant in the youth ministry program to connect to some – but not all – core members.

Connect Steps:

- Ask questions. This shows interest. Give them an opportunity to teach you about something they are passionate about.
- Meet them where they are. Take another core member with you to games, events, places, lunches, etc., remembering to notify the teen's parents or ask for permission first.
- Involve teens in the planning and execution of Life Nights.
- Be available.

CARE

Involves many teenagers

Contact leads to connection with many teenagers which grows organically into care for many teenagers, the ones the core members have connected with most. Not every core member will know enough every teen in the program well enough to truly extend care, and this level of relational ministry acknowledges that fact. The goal is for all teens at the parish to be cared for by someone. At this level of relationship ministry, trust and respect is well-established between a core member and a teen.

Care Steps:

- Actively listen.
- Ask open-ended questions that draw the conversation to a deeper level.
- Earn the right to be heard.
- Meet their parents and affirm your support of their parenting.
- Be willing to share your faith experience.
- Ask for prayer requests and intercede.

CHALLENGE

Involves some teenagers

This is the level where we can most profoundly impact the life of a young person. This relational level demands an investment of time and energy. Each teen — from the most committed to the least — must be intentionally journeyed with by someone on your team to make a lasting impact on their faith journey.

Challenge Steps:

- Ask questions that challenge assumptions and behaviors.
- Be ready for questions; if you don't know the answer, find it.
- Speak the truth even when it is difficult.
- Pray with them.
- Be prepared for teens to fall and to walk with them through it.
- Respect the work that can only happen over time.

COMMITMENT

Involves a few teenagers

Youth ministers and core members may have the opportunity for an ongoing journey of discipleship with young people as they become evangelists. This rare opportunity often only applies to a few teens over the course of a ministry commitment.

Commitment Steps:

- Encourage teens into leadership roles.
- Challenge them to give a witness talk to peers.
- Invite them to help with Edge middle school ministry or Confirmation preparation.
- Continue to affirm and challenge.
- Help them form a small group of committed teens.
- Make room for them to volunteer over the summer when they get back from college.

CO-WORKER IN THE VINEYARD

Involves a few teenagers

Provide continued support as teenagers grow into evangelists and disciples, filling your role as a youth minister or core member. At this stage, a young person ministers independently without your assistance. They take initiative in ministry and are a consistent living witness for Christ.

In a real and profound way, God has entrusted each young person in your program to you. This sacred entrustment requires on your part and the part of your core team the willingness to journey with every young person in your program. It is a commitment to trying again, and again, and again. A commitment to reaching out again, and again, and again. A commitment to inviting in again, and again, and again. It is all in imitation of Jesus who knocks, visits, implores, invites, challenges,

calls, cares, shows concern, is present, goes out to the one, and loves — again and again and again. Experiencing for ourselves His solicitude in our own lives, we care for these young people with a heart that echoes the persistence of Christ. God has great desires for our young people, and He invites us to accompany them as mentors and guides as they journey closer to Him and discover His love more deeply.

THE DOS AND DON'TS OF FACILITATING SMALL GROUPS

THE DOS

- Start small group time in prayer.
- Remind everyone that what is said is not to be repeated outside of the small group.
- Use fun opening questions to help the youth get to know each other more.
- Use small group questions to help facilitate discussion and conversation.
- Include everyone in the conversation.
- Hold back some of the stronger personalities through positive acknowledgement, and stating a desire to hear what others have to share.
- Try different strategies to help shier youth participate such as going around in the circle to let everyone share an answer.
- Always be attentive and listen to what the youth have to say.
- Affirm and thank the youth for sharing.
- Do not be afraid to allow times of silence.
- Read through the small group discussion and activity plans before the Life Night.
- Have all the necessary materials for small group activities before small groups start.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to lead the discussion, and if you get off topic gently guide the youth back to some of the small group questions.

THE DON'TS

- Do not give another teaching or finish the teaching with what you think should have been said.
- Do not dominate the conversation; this is not a time to share all your opinions and advice but to let the youth respond.
- Do not just power through the small group questions, or feel pressured to make it through the whole list.
- Do not just let one youth respond or a few dominate the whole small group time, be sure to hear at least once from every youth.
- Do not allow or permit taunting or bullying of any kind.
- Do not be unprepared, the youth will know.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF PRESENTING TO TEENS

1. **Speak, don't read.** You'll be easier to understand, and you'll be better able to make genuine contact with your teens.
2. **Stand up.** You'll be easier to see and hear, and it offers you the authoritative position.
3. **Use visual aids.** People are visual creatures. Catholicism is an incarnational and sacramental faith. Reinforce words with images when appropriate.
4. **Move around.** Don't pace but don't stand still. Use your hands and your feet to animate the words coming out of your mouth.
5. **Vary the pitch of your voice.** Monotones are sleep-inducing. Your voice is your instrument and varying the pitch, tone, and pentameter engages your audience.
6. **Speak loudly, clearly, and confidently.** Speak from the gut, not the throat. Breathe deeply - it's necessary for volume.
7. **Make eye contact with the teens.** If eye contact makes you more nervous, stare at foreheads - your audience won't know the difference. Avoid looking at the ground or constantly to the left or to the right half of your audience.
8. **Focus on main points.** Less is often more. Give them short, striking points that they'll remember. A good rule of thumb is to make no more than three main points in any given talk. Hit those points more than once in different ways.
9. **Read body language.** If people seem to be disengaged or getting restless or distracted the problem may not be you. Is the room too hot or too cold? Too dark? Can people see you well? Their body posture and silence (or lack thereof) will tell you a great deal.
10. **Finish on time.** For most teens, the maximum attention span is six-to-ten minutes. If you exceed this limit (unless you are a seasoned presenter to teens) you'll probably lose them.

IDENTIFYING YOUR GIFTS

Each of us is uniquely gifted — with both natural and supernatural gifts from God. We were born with strengths and talents, and we have learned and developed more throughout our lives. By virtue of our Baptism, and then stirred up even more at our Confirmation, we have also each been given supernatural gifts, or charisms, by the Holy Spirit. These spiritual gifts are strengthened through the sacraments and are given to us solely for the service of others to build up the Kingdom of God.

Take a moment to pick up your Bible and read 1 Corinthians, chapter 12. (Yes, the entire chapter.) It's a quick chapter and important to the understanding of our gifts. Saint Paul shares that the Holy Spirit gives us incredible gifts, and the Church needs the entire Body of Christ — all of us, with all our unique gifts — to function properly.

DISCOVERING YOUR GIFTS

Several helpful tools exist that are great to use together as core members. Gallup's CliftonStrengths (previously known as StrengthsFinder 2.0) is an assessment to learn about your natural talents. There are also inventories available to help you learn about your spiritual charisms — those supernatural gifts that the Holy Spirit has given you to help build up the Kingdom. The combination of natural and supernatural gifts that God has bestowed upon you are vital and needed in the Church — that is why the Holy Spirit gave them to you.

The more we understand our gifts, the better we are able to use them. Identifying your own strengths and charisms and leaning into them is going to bear so much fruit! When you tap into that natural or supernatural gift of the Holy Spirit and use it more and more, it can grow in power. Although, be prepared: the strange thing about charisms is that if your gift is currently not needed where you are, it will likely go dormant, or disappear, and the Lord will give you other supernatural gifts that He needs you to use for the Church today.

The following are great assessment tools you and your core team can use:

- CliftonStrengths Online Talent Assessment ([gallup.com](https://www.gallup.com))
- Called & Gifted workshop ([siena.org](https://www.siena.org))
- Spiritual Gifts Inventory (stjohnsindy.org)

USING YOUR GIFTS AS A TEAM

It is not enough for us to just understand our own gifts. When you are part of a team, knowing each other's strengths and charisms allows you to work so much more effectively together. This knowledge makes choosing who will be assigned to hospitality, who will help with setup, who will organize the schedule, who will pray over the sick teen, and who will help that teen prepare to give a witness an easy task.

It also helps a team to build each other up. If you are struggling with a problem, go to the person with the gift of wisdom. If you are trying to make a decision, seek out the person with the gift of discernment for advice. And everyone wants to hang out with the core member who has the gift of encouragement when things get tough!

Your unique gifts are so necessary for the Body of Christ. Name them. Learn about them. Pray about them. Use them.

SOLUTIONS TO CORE CONFLICT

CONFLICT: CORE SLACKER

Webster's dictionary defines the word "slacker" as "a person who avoids work or effort." The definition of a core slacker is, "a core member who shows up late for set up, leaves early from clean up, has little to no follow through on assigned tasks, and/or is last minute in his or her planning of the Life or Edge night." However, this person is usually the most loved core member by the teens. Ugh!

At some point, every youth minister will deal with one or more core members that fit this description. The conflict arises when other core members get frustrated with the slacker(s) and start talking behind their backs. Eventually, other core members will start to slack off if you, as a youth minister, do nothing about the lack of effort or work ethic. So what do you do with such a person on your core team?

Solution:

- Get ahead of the conflict whenever possible. Meet with core candidates one-on-one before accepting them to the team and have them sign a Core Covenant. Be clear about your expectations and the time commitment involved. Ask them to be on time, as a sign of respect to all the core members serving the teens with their time and talent. What they communicate to the core team with their slacker mentality is that what they are doing is unimportant, and this is the source of hurt and conflict in the core team.
- Address concerns one-on-one, if possible, in person, away from the other core members. Remind them of the Core Covenant and share how their actions affect the core you. If it continues repeatedly, ask them to leave the core team.

CONFLICT: LACK OF COMMUNICATION

Poor or no communication is often the largest cause of core conflict. There are a variety of scenarios between core members and/or between the core and the youth minister that cause friction and frustration. The reality is if you have little in place outside a tear-down meeting at the end of the night to effectively communicate the details of the ministry on a weekly basis, then frustration from poor communication will inevitably ensue. This will lead to confusion, lack of commitment, and a lazy atmosphere where the teens are not getting the best of the core. Whether the lack of communication stems from the youth minister or between core members, here are some suggestions to prioritize communication and avoid unnecessary drama.

Solution:

- Send weekly emails to your core team. These can include a thank you and evaluation affirming core for the previous night, birthday reminders (teens and core), upcoming Life Night outlines/reminders, upcoming dates and information for events, and relational ministry reminders (who is going to what teen events that week). Not all core members will utilize emails for communication purposes, so a variety of communication tools should be utilized. If your core team is not communicating with one another, consider having all their meetings scheduled at the church and attend them personally. For groups that lack communication skills, check in weekly to ensure things are getting completed.
- Have bi-weekly (or at the very least monthly) planning meetings where the upcoming schedule and events are communicated to the core team in person. Be sure that any assignments for the upcoming Life Nights for that month are communicated clearly and everyone knows what their role is and what is expected of them. Have core members who are paired together for Life Nights discuss how they will communicate and prepare in the coming weeks.

CONFLICT: GOSSIP

Social media can often create a lot of gossip or bad communication on a core team: friending, unfriending, he said/she said, hurtful words, choosing sides, misunderstandings, etc. Outside social media, core will build relationships with one another that might cause gossip in the ministry. Such gossip is hurtful and almost always lacks truth. Gossip is never good on a core team, and whether it is done via social media, behind the back, or face-to-face, it must be dealt with immediately. This is not only an issue with younger core members, but can arise with more mature adults as well. Here are some suggestions on how to deal with gossip on your core team.

Solution:

- Have a one or two-year out-of-high school age requirement for core members. Maturity can help take care of a lot of these issues before they happen.
- Be sure to get the facts straight before confronting anyone about what has been said or done. Without facts, you are just perpetuating the rumor that you think you are confronting.
- Prior to conflict arising or when a conflict arises, establish and instill the following rules:
 - If you have an issue with a fellow core member, go to them directly and discuss it.
 - If you cannot solve the problem, invite the youth minister to mediate a conversation.
 - Strive to come to a place of forgiveness and peace.
 - If that does not work, take it to the priest or pastor or ask one or both core to leave the core team.

Do not involve teens or other core in the conflict or problem.

Do not post your conflicts on public or private social media, email, or text communication channels with friends, family, or other core.

Lift one another up; do not tear one another down.

Always ask one who is prone to gossip, “Is this going to change my opinion of the person if you tell it to me?” If the answer is yes, ask them not to say anything.

CONFLICT: NEW VS. VETERAN CORE

Depending on the personalities of your core team, the new core will either breathe life into your ministry or threaten the veteran core. If a new core member is not brought into the ministry well, he or she can be intimidated and leave the ministry prior to God calling him or her out. In addition, some veteran core members will be threatened by the new core members that the teens tend to gravitate to in the excitement of getting to know someone new. Your core team can also become an exclusive club to an outsider. If you are not aware of it, you will have a very small core team and, eventually, as God calls veteran core to a new ministry, you will have no core at all.

One way to avoid this is to constantly recruit core members; not just once a year, but consistently. As new core members come on board, be prepared to partner them with veteran core and take time to train them. It might be possible to ask one or two of your truly veteran core members to be official trainers to help get the new core involved quickly so you don’t have to take on that entire burden. Here are some additional suggestions on how to avoid the conflict between new and veteran core members.

Solution:

- Ask the veteran core to mentor a new core member for the first two to three weeks of ministry. Have them run small groups together and work on Life Nights together until they are confident on their own. Be aware of personalities and pair introverted core with extroverted core, more creative personalities with more detail-oriented personalities, etc.
- If you still have trouble with the veteran core, or new core feel threatened or diminished, have one-on-one conversations to see the root of the problem. They might be feeling overlooked or underappreciated.

CONFLICT: NOT BEING USED ENOUGH

When the core feels overlooked or underused, conflict will soon follow. At the root of this conflict lies a truth that the gifts God has given an individual are not being shared. Sometimes, core members want

to share their gifts more for their glory than God's, and other times, they really don't have the gifts they think they have. On some occasions, they are jealous of core members who attract the attention of teens and are in the "spotlight." Still, most of the time, core members are just not being empowered to share what they honestly have to give for God to be glorified.

Solution:

- Do a core evaluation annually with each core member and ask them where they desire to grow in the coming year.
- Be honest with them if they are not strong in an area; however, be willing to work with them to grow. If adults do not grow from being on core, we have failed them as youth ministers.
- If a core member lacks humility, create opportunities for them to serve in humble ways such as taking out the trash, cooking a meal at a Life Night, setting up the environment, or parking lot duty at the end of the night.
- If jealousy is the issue, work one-on-one with the core member and affirm their gifts more often.
- Finally, if they want to do more and it is something they are called to do, work with them and give them opportunities to serve.

CONFLICT: BEING ASKED TO DO TOO MUCH

Core burnout is a very real situation that can cause a lot of conflict and frustration, especially when you have a small core team. This conflict can also happen when a youth minister only trusts a few select core members and/or the youth minister doesn't ask more than a handful to really do the dirty work. This causes ministry to feel more like a burden than a blessing and will eventually lead to core members leaving ministry. It is important to remember that when you only have a few adults who have fully committed to being core members, the need to involve parents to aid with food, hospitality, environment, set up, and tear down is absolutely necessary. Keep core members focused on the teens and delegate some of the non-relational tasks to adults in the community who can help on a less consistent basis.

Solution:

- Evenly delegate tasks to core members.
- Follow up with core members to make sure tasks will be done in a timely manner and that they feel they have ample time to do the tasks required.
- Create committees to assist with some of the tasks of ministry so core can concentrate on relational ministry and Life Nights.
- Take a week off from time to time for core night out.

- Evaluate annually if core members feel called to continue on the core team. Sometimes the greatest blessing you can give a core member is an open door out, rather than a feeling of guilt that keeps them in.

CONFLICT: DATING/BREAKING UP OF CORE

Oh, the joys of core members dating. Rarely does it end in “I do,” so this is often a big core conflict. I’m sure it does not take much for you to imagine this scenario: two core members have fallen madly in love and are practically glued to one another during life night — at set up, at mass, in small groups during Life Nights, and even when the trash needs to be taken out. Suddenly, the two are not talking and the whispers between female and male core begin. You would think you were back in high school from all the “silent treatments” happening in your parish hall. It soon becomes apparent that the breakup happened and now you have a core divided by sexes or sides based on who was right and who was wrong.

This conflict might not be able to be avoided; however, creating some boundaries with couples when the relationship is in its early stages is a great way to avoid conflict prior to a break up and during a courtship.

Solution:

- Create some rules for public displays of affection (e.g., no kissing in front of teens, no cuddling, etc.) for core members who are dating as well as for teens who date.
- Discuss with the core that they are modeling what a strong Catholic Christian relationship is and ask them to be a true witness of the Catholic faith on all levels.
- Do not allow them to discuss their dates or relationship with the teens.
- Discuss with them that, if in fact they do break up, you do not want them discussing their relationship with the teens or fellow core in an attempt to make one person look bad or have core and teens choose sides.
- If they break up and cannot be on core together, ask both of them to leave (usually one will remain but that will be a decision they make together).

CONFLICT: ALL GLORY TO...ME?

There will unfortunately be times when conversations with core begin with, “Why do I have to do it when they don’t?” or “I’m better at giving the Proclaim! Why do you have him or her doing it? They’re horrible at it!” The comparing game and backstabbing can even happen on core teams. So how do you deal with the comparison game? And what do you do when your core members think they are the best at everything and tear others down to lift themselves up?

This attack can be directed toward the core and/or the youth minister. When this begins to happen it can steal all the joy in ministry. Core will start by attacking the details of the night and what someone has done or has failed to do. Eventually, core will start to attack the other individuals on their team. This comparison and struggle to be the best is detrimental to the health of your ministry and core team, and it needs to be dealt with whenever it arises.

Solution:

- If you overhear a core member talking about another core member, talk to them on the side and ask them to stop (if necessary, discipline them).
- Explain that you want people to grow in this ministry and sometimes it will not be the way you would do it. It will, however, always be done through prayer and discernment.
- Ask all core members to rehearse skits and talks with you so that they are set up for success, and offer suggestions on how to improve all aspects of a Life Night.
- If a core member is lacking in humility, ask them to do some behind the scenes tasks to help them grow in humility (take out the trash, clean up after a messy game, run audio/ visual, etc.).
- Remind them that this is for God's glory and not their own.

CONFLICT: NEEDY/CLINGY CORE

Sometimes core members join Life Teen because they desire community. It really isn't about the teens; it's about their lack of friends. It can also be about their lack of social skills to connect with peers their own age. Other times it's about romance. Sometimes the male core will be clingy with the female core to the point that they ask all of them out on a date. Other times, the female core can be looking for the perfect husband by being on the core team. Whether it is core discerning their future vocation or someone seeking peers to be in relationship with, clingy and needy core can cause division and conflict on your core team.

Solution:

- Evaluate if this is the right ministry for them, or if they are seeking to fill a need.
- If it is the right ministry, you might need to talk to them about some social skills necessary for the ministry (hugging policies, overuse of social media, etc.).
- Encourage them to be involved in something outside the parish. Usually church involvement is their life and as much as we might want to use this to our advantage, it is not right to do so.
- Schedule a time once a month to have one-on-one time with them so they don't demand it on a weekly/daily basis. Make it a special time where they feel like you give them your full attention. This will eliminate the need for you to center your attention on them at Life Nights.
- Share with them any concerns that arise in a kind, loving way.

EXCERPTS FROM THE LIFE TEEN MISSION COMMUNITIES RULE OF LIFE

These excerpts are taken from the Life Teen Missions Communities Rule of Life which is a document that guides the communal life of Life Teen staff and missionaries who live at our camps. It has been refined by years of experience of people striving together to serve the Lord while accepting the daily struggles of being human and living in community. Though you and your core team do not all live together nor have you committed to a Rule of Life, it may be helpful for you all to adopt some of these practices in a way that is fitting for your group.

REMAINING IN CHRIST AND IN HIS LOVE

“Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me, you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.” (John 15:4-9)

Prayer — remaining in Christ and in His love — is non-negotiable. Our entire culture depends on prayer, for we can do nothing if we do not remain in His love. The spirituality of the Rule can be defined as “dynamic orthodoxy” — fully in line with the Roman Catholic Church, which includes an openness to the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. By fostering a communal culture of ongoing prayer, Life Teen Mission Communities will be filled with people striving to make worship a lifestyle.

TRUST AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Healthy community life is built on a foundation of trust. Oftentimes, there are unexplainable gaps between what we expect people to do and what they actually do. We can choose to fill these gaps with trust or suspicion. As Christians, we have been called to trust; anything else erodes our team.

Promise #1: I choose to trust you.

Three commitments I need to make to embrace trust:

1. When there is a gap between what I expect and what I experience, I will fill it with trust. I am choosing to believe the best in you.
2. When I experience others filling that gap with suspicion, I will come to your defense.
3. If what I experience or see begins to erode my trust, I am committed to come directly to you about it.

Promise #2: I will be trustworthy.

Being trustworthy is not equivalent to being flawless in character or performance. It simply means being worthy of trust. A trustworthy person addresses the gaps they have created. When I create a gap, when I don't come through on a promise or commitment, I own the gap and address it.

Three commitments I need to make to be trustworthy:

1. I commit to do what I say I will do and if I don't, I will tell you before you hear it from someone else.
2. I commit not to over-promise and under-deliver, but if it looks like this will happen, I will let you know about it. Preventing surprises is trustworthiness.
3. If you confront me about the gaps I have created, I will tell you the truth.

GLORIFY GOD THROUGH RECONCILING WITH ONE ANOTHER

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that 'every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church." (Matthew 18:15-17)

We are committed to intentionally loving all people in our community, to reconciling quickly, and to forgiving as often as God forgives us. We will hurt one another, but God can build relationships even through these challenging situations.

Steps to healthy conflict resolution:

1. Pray about the situation. Ask God to reveal His truth.
2. Take responsibility for our part in the conflict/situation.
3. Commit to loving the person before talking to the person.
4. Address the issue one-on-one and focus on the issue, not the person.
5. Person who is approached: accept responsibility for the sin/offense and commit to making the situation right. Thank the person who approached you for caring enough to approach you lovingly.
6. Pray together that God may be glorified as both people move forward.

GLORIFY GOD IN DYING TO SELF

Dying to self is a sacrifice. Our love is made sacred when we give of ourselves for the sake of another out of reverence for Christ. In living the Christian life, especially in community, we will be presented each day with opportunities to deny ourselves, pick up our cross and follow Jesus.

“Live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desires of the flesh.” (Galatians 5:16)

“Those who belong to Christ have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires.” (Galatians 5:24)

“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”
(Matthew 16:24)

“I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given Himself up for me.”
(Galatians 2:19-20)

“We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves; let each of us please our neighbor for the good, for building up.” (Romans 15:1-2)

GLORIFY GOD IN OUR SPEECH

“Encourage one another and build one another up.” (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

“No foul language should come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for needed edification, that it may impart grace to those who hear.” (Ephesians 4:29)

“A cheerful glance brings joy to the heart, good news invigorates the bones.” (Proverbs 15:30)

Three poisons of community life are complaining, sarcasm, and gossip. We strive to use our speech to encourage, affirm, and show gratitude. In addition, we seek to rid our speech of all profanity.

A WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CORE MEMBERS

DAY ONE: WITH ALL THEIR HEART

“The saints are not supermen, nor were they born perfect. They are like us, like each one of us. They are people who, before reaching the glory of heaven, lived normal lives with joys and sorrows, struggles and hopes. What changed their lives? When they recognized God’s love, they followed it with all their heart without reserve or hypocrisy. They spent their lives serving others, they endured suffering and adversity without hatred and responded to evil with good, spreading joy and peace. This is the life of a saint.” These words were spoken by Pope Francis during his Angelus Address on November 1, 2013 — All Saints Day. In them, we hear the core of what constitutes a saint, that they recognized God’s love and followed it with their whole heart.

As someone who works in ministry and strives for sainthood, it’s worth pondering these words and bringing them into conversation with the Lord.

Have I ever truly recognized your love? Has it changed my life?

Do I follow you with all my heart? Without reserve? Without hypocrisy?

To sit with these questions and allow them to penetrate our hearts is the beginning of sainthood; to hear what the Lord says and allow it to change our lives is its fulfillment. Today, bring these questions to the Lord with an open and honest heart. Give yourself some time to reflect on them, and give the Lord space to respond. Listen to what He is saying to your heart. When you’re done, ask the Lord for the grace to always recognize His love and follow it with your whole heart.

DAY TWO: SET APART

Have you ever dreamed of being so madly in love with God that it changes everything? Have you ever thought about what might happen if you actually surrendered everything to God? This is holiness. All too often we hear that word and it can conjure up images of piety that seem foreign, unattainable, or unrealistic, but holiness is not moral perfection or the product of religious ritualism. It doesn’t turn us into religious automatons, rather, it makes us more ourselves, more human. Holiness is simply life set apart for God. It is life oriented entirely toward Him. It is a total giving over of oneself to the Lord. This is what sets saints apart, this is what makes them holy. Rather than taking away from our lives, it is the only thing that can truly satisfy the desires of our hearts.

What do we all want, in the end – Fulfillment? Happiness? Meaning? To be fully human, fully alive, fully in love? There is a word and a path that satisfies, that encapsulates all of this, and that word is **holiness**. To give everything to the Lord, to be set apart for His sake, to be dedicated entirely to the One who made you and knows you and loves you. That is holiness. That is fulfillment.

Today, speak with the Lord about these thoughts.

How do I view holiness? Do I see it as something freeing and fulfilling? Do I think it will constrain and suffocate me?

Do I actually believe that holiness is what I'm searching for?

The joy of the saints gives witness to the truth about holiness, and their lives manifest that it's not only possible, but that it's worth it.

DAY THREE: TO BE MYSELF

The Cistercian monk Thomas Merton famously wrote, "For me to be a saint means to be myself." It is one thing to acknowledge that saints come from all walks of life, it is another entirely to acknowledge that they might come from my own. Even more unlikely (or so we think), that they might come from me being precisely who the Lord has created me to be, who He dreams I will be. However, the lives of the saints testify again and again to this reality.

Sainthood is not a drastic divorce from our identity but its proper development. God is the one who has bestowed on me my identity, and He longs to bring my deepest self to absolute fulfillment and maturity.

As we come before God in all authenticity, we give Him permission to sanctify and transform every aspect of who we are. Every quirk, every interest, every so-called personality flaw becomes another means for grace to break through into the world and the precise vessel that God desires to bring about my own conversion and the conversion of those around me. As easy as this is to read, it is far more difficult to believe and even more difficult to live by. Only by seeing myself as God sees me can I begin to believe little by little that I'm actually who He wants me to be. He does not ask me to be someone else. He does not compare me to anyone else.

If we wish to be saints, we have to own Merton's phrase for ourselves. For me to be a saint means to be _____. Put your name there. Say that phrase out loud. Let it sink in. How does it feel? Does it excite you? Does it terrify you? Do you think it's complete foolishness? Do you believe it? The Lord

believes it, whether you do or not. Talk to Him today about how you respond to that statement, and pray for the grace to see yourself as He does.

DAY FOUR: HERE I AM LORD

If it's true God delights in me as I am, then I always have to come before Him as I am, nothing more and nothing less. Illusions, masks, and filters have no place in our relationship with God. An essential step on the road to holiness is to do away with any sham or facade. We have to be real, honest, genuine — in a word, authentic.

Authenticity is the foundation of holiness. In order for the Lord to bring to fulfillment who we truly are, we have to continually come to Him as we are now, in all simplicity and honesty. It demands vulnerability, but that vulnerability gives Him the space to actually change our hearts. What is keeping you from coming before the Lord in full authenticity today? Is there anything you are holding back from Him? Are you frustrated? Are you angry? Are you bored? Are you scared? Are you alone? Tell Him. Be honest with Him.

Hiding how we truly feel from the Lord is like hiding ailments from a doctor, until they are brought into the light no healing or improvement can take place. Be real, even more real than you would with your best friend or spouse. Jesus wants all of you, not just the parts you want to show Him or you think are good enough already. Come before Him today without holding anything back.

DAY FIVE: IN GOOD COMPANY

There are parts of our hearts that we'd rather leave unseen. There are things we've done that we aren't proud of and don't want people to know about. There are personality quirks and character flaws that we'd prefer to dissociate from ourselves.

Saint John Vianney struggled through seminary and was thought too simple to be an effective pastor. By the time he died, thousands of pilgrims would come to his parish to have him hear their confessions. Saint Moses the Black was a slave, murderer, thief, and gang leader; that is, until he sought refuge from the authorities among some monks out in the desert — then he became a monk himself. Saint Augustine obstinately refused to devote himself to God until his early thirties. He found his passions more appealing than his faith throughout his early life, fathering an illegitimate son and struggling vehemently with chastity. He went on to become one of the most influential minds in all of Christianity.

If you feel too unequipped, too unqualified, or too untraditional to be a saint, you're in good company. Church history is riddled with saints who weren't their own first pick for holiness, but they trusted in God more than themselves, and it made all the difference. The only thing separating you from the rest of these saints is putting your past, present, and future entirely into the Lord's hands, without reserve, without excuse, and without fear.

Today, bring your fears and lies before the Lord. Tell Him that you trust Him and that you want to give Him every part of yourself. He can and will use everything you offer, every part of who you are, you just have to be willing to hand everything over to Him. Every lie, every insecurity, every weakness, every failure can be transformed if given over to Him. Nothing is wasted in His hands.

DAY SIX: THE HANDMAID OF THE LORD

Mary is the example par excellence of being open to the Lord in every circumstance, of giving everything over to Him even when you feel unworthy or unprepared. The ancient Angelus prayer models her disposition of receptivity, and praying it every day can teach us to be open to God's work at every moment, just as she was.

As you pray it today, note how it unfolds. The angel Gabriel tells Mary she will conceive. She receives the news in obedience and trust, giving herself over entirely to the Lord's will. This humble reception leads to God becoming incarnate and dwelling in the very midst of us. What Mary lived very profoundly at one moment in history remains available for us to live every day.

Our circumstances communicate to us how God is at work. We can choose to be open and receptive to His presence, and if we do He will truly be incarnate in our lives. God comes to meet us in our midst, in our circumstances, in our ordinary, daily lives. If we are open to Him and willing to receive Him, it changes everything. This receptivity is the disposition of saints.

Pray the Angelus today, and learn from Mary what it means to truly be open to the Lord.

The Angel of the Lord declared to Mary: And she conceived of the Holy Spirit.

Hail Mary...

Behold the handmaid of the Lord: Be it done unto me according to Thy word.

Hail Mary...

And the Word was made Flesh: And dwelt among us.

Hail Mary...

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray:

Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts;

that we, to whom the incarnation of Christ, Thy Son,

was made known by the message of an angel,

may by His Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection,

through the same Christ Our Lord.

Amen.

DAY SEVEN: IN IMITATION OF CHRIST

Saints come from all walks of life and all sorts of circumstances, yet they all share one common goal — to be identified with Christ. Their lives are modeled on Christ's, and as disciples they seek to imitate their teacher.

This is where the name Christian comes from in the first place. It implies an association with and conformity to Christ. The Acts of the Apostles says that “in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians” (11:26). Note that these disciples didn't name themselves but were called Christians by those around them. They were identified by their relation to Jesus Christ. He was their ultimate defining characteristic. This is what it means to be a Christian, and it begs questions for our own lives.

Do we live like Him? Do those who live alongside you know you are a Christian? Do they associate you with Christ? What do they call you? What do they see as the defining characteristic of your life?

How are you identified? A youth minister? A Republican or Democrat? Teacher? Parent? Athlete? Business professional? The list goes on.

We can so easily root our identity in any number of things, but the mark of a Christian is conformity to Christ. The goal of a saint is to be identified with Him. This should be our goal and reality, to the point where others define us by it. Today, reflect on the name Christian and what it means to be like Christ and beg the Lord for the grace to truly live up to the name.