



Diocese of Buffalo Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministry

Evaluation & Strategic Planning Report

MAJOR CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION:

Over the past several months, the DYYAM has engaged in evaluating and assessing their services and programs, as part of an overall strategic planning process. The DYYAM staff hopes that through this process they may continue to understand the needs of the youth, young adults, and ministry leaders whom they serve. The DYYAM contracted with Ministry Training Source to facilitate and conduct assessment and evaluation, employing appropriate research rigor throughout the process. This summary includes the major conclusions and findings.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Full report available at
www.dobyouth.org
or by calling
716.847.8789

The Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministry is like many diocesan offices throughout the country, given a broad mission with finite resources and staff to accomplish the mission. Good stewardship requires that periodically our leaders evaluate their current efforts and develop strategic plans that enable them to more effectively achieve their mission. In this vein, the DYYAM engaged faithfully in evaluating itself and the needs of its stakeholders, utilizing a process guided by the principles of research to ensure objectivity and reduce bias. Based upon the high response rate of 58%, meaning at least one leader from more than half of all diocesan parishes completed this evaluation and assessment, one can conclude that these findings may be generalized to the broader population of ministry leaders serving or overseeing youth and young adult ministry in the diocese. What follows are conclusions drawn from the data.

Parish Youth Ministry Leadership

Generally, parish youth ministry leaders are experienced, with an average of 11 years. The most experienced group of YMLs is paid full-time. However, continued ministry formation is needed, as the majority of both paid (35.6%) and volunteer (68.4%) leaders have not completed any formal ministry formation, and are not currently in any formal program. It is important to note that the need for additional training was identified in various places throughout this research.

Participation in DYYAM Programs

Training programs are the highest level of contact with all youth ministry leaders, reaching 52% of all those responding to the survey and 78% of leaders involved in youth ministry. The Diocesan Youth Convention represents the highest level of contact with youth, with 59% of the respondents

indicating parish participation. Other major youth programs reach between a quarter to one-third of all parishes, with the exception of two programs, which had the lowest percentage of participation from parishes: the Buffalo Bisons' Games (18%) and DaBounce (9%).

Gap Analysis between Strategic Value and Effectiveness of DYYAM Services and Programs

Within Category One, all training and formation items were considered essential and all were rated as effective; this indicates a possible need for improvement in this area, if one goes from the premise that what is essential should also be very effective. The largest gap between the strategic value and effectiveness rating in Category Two came in the area of providing consultation for hiring, which was rated as important and somewhat effective. However, it is important to note that one-third of the sample rated it "minimally impor-

tant” (16%) or “not necessary” (16%). It is not clear from this data if there is a need for the office to do more to assist parishes and pastors in hiring. Within Category Three, it seems the areas of communicating a vision of youth ministry with parishes and educating parish youth ministry leaders need improvement. Category Four indicates that the programs with the largest gaps are the Buffalo Bisons’ Games and DaBounce. However, it is important to note that Buffalo Bisons’ Games were rated “minimally important.”

Direct vs. Indirect Services

Based upon the gaps identified, it seems that the DYYAM has a common dilemma that many diocesan departments have, which is the struggle between providing direct services to constituents (in this case youth and young adults) and indirect services to parish leaders serving these constituents. The data indicate the need for more indirect services, including training and consultation, and less direct services, including programs to youth. The evidence for this shift can

be seen in the priority listings of stakeholders that the DYYAM serves, with parish leaders being in the top three positions.

Elimination of Programs

If the department is to increase services and programs in one area it must make the difficult choice of what to eliminate. The most telling data in this research about what to eliminate might very well be in the programs in Category Four that were rated “minimally important” or “not necessary;” they included:

Diocesan One Day Retreats

DaBounce

Bishop McNulty Award Dinner

Midsummer Charity Ball

Buffalo Bisons’ Games

Collaboration Between Youth/Young Adult Ministry and Catechesis

Collaboration with other offices was an area rated “somewhat effective,” indicating that respondents are not aware of the extent of current collaboration, especially with Catechesis. The overlap between the roles of catechetical leaders and youth ministry leaders is evident

in the need to include both in the sample in order to get the best picture of the DYYAM; seven percent describe themselves as both and only 13% consider themselves solely youth ministry leaders. It seems that continued collaboration and networking between these two groups or roles and the diocesan department serving them would benefit ministry to youth and young adults in the diocese.

Needs of Stakeholders

The prioritized needs of youth indicate the need for youth to participate and experience the life and mission of the church at the local and diocesan levels. The top three youth programs (Convention, CLI, and YCAW) seem to be well-fitted to meet the identified needs of youth. The focus groups seem to point to the need for expanding ministry to junior high youth, but this was not confirmed by any other source of data, with Junior High Youth being number 6 of 8 on the prioritized stakeholder listing. The high priority for youth ministry leaders suggests attention be given to development of ministry skills and networking. The need for

additional training has been well documented by this research. The similarly high priority for young adults indicates a need for better connection to the parish community and programs that encourage spiritual development, pastoral care, and social justice experiences. Again, the indicated need to expand ministry in this area from the focus groups is not supported by rank ordering of stakeholders of the DYYAM, which put young adults at 7 of 8. Due to the recent development of programs and services in this area, further evaluation and research directly with young adults is needed to get a better idea of how the DYYAM should respond in its strategic planning in this area.

Overall Effectiveness Rating

The DYYAM received “effective” or “very effective” ratings in all items evaluated, except for five items, which received a “somewhat effective” rating; nothing was rated “not effective.” Clearly, the three major youth programs, DYC, CLI, and YCAW are utilized by the majority of parishes and considered to be highly effective.