

Choosing Young People for Leadership Training. – Chris Ashby

As you look through this month's Compass, I am sure that you have realized by now that the Archdiocesan summer programs for youth are approaching rather quickly. I also know that the life of the parish youth ministry coordinator is jammed this time of year between, Confirmation, retreats, preparation for Easter and the like. Many of you may be thinking to yourself, "If one more thing lands on my desk I will..." I am sure that you can finish the statement. The fact of the matter is that the summer programs offered by the division of Youth and Young Adult Ministry might be just what the doctor ordered.

I know that we are busy and we all have to make decisions about what gets done and what gets put aside. These programs are important. We need to make time to plug young people in. In the Bishop's document Renewing the Vision there are eight components that should be included in all youth ministry programs. Leadership is one of these components.

The component of leadership calls us to develop adults and young people as leaders in our parish both in the youth ministry program and the parish as a whole. We need to afford our young people opportunities to learn from others what it means to be a servant leader, what it means to be like Christ. I am sure that many of you do just that in your day-to-day programming, but sometimes we may need to do more. High LI and Justice Action Week are just the way to do more.

High LI focuses on developing more traditional leadership skills. Skills like program planning, public speaking, organization, and time management are intertwined with prayer and worship skills that help young people develop into the leaders our parishes need. Justice Action Week (JAW) prepares young leaders by teaching them about the Church's mission in the world. Young people are immersed into an experience that helps them understand Catholic Social Teaching and how our church needs to be active in the community and the world. Each program exposes young people to new skills and ideas that will in fact foster their development as young leaders.

I am sure by now I have you at a point where you want to send all of your young people to these programs right now. Well that would be great, but the bishop's also call us to be developmentally appropriate in youth ministry. These programs might not be for every young person. So then the question we are left with is, "How do I choose a young person to High LI or JAW?" Hopefully what follows will help you answer this question.

When selecting young people for either of these programs there are, a few things that you as a youth minister will want to consider. They are:

- Is this young person the right age for this program?

High LI and Jaw both have age requirements for those who wish to attend. Many of us might have great young people in our programs that are not old enough yet and may be inclined to try and get them in early. We would advise against this. The Division develops these programs in a way that the content and expectations are developmentally appropriate. Placing a young person in a situation where they are developmentally unready does not help them or the program

- Has this young person ever been away from home before?

Both of these programs are live in programs that span several days. Some young people may not have had the opportunity to be away from home for this long and this program may cause more anxiety than is necessary. You should make sure that a young person is ready to go away before you have them make a commitment.

- Can this young person be successful at High LI or JAW?

High LI and JAW are both challenging programs. They both require a level of maturity and discipline among their participants. There are assignments and responsibilities given to participants of both programs that must be completed in a timely fashion for the process to work. A young person needs to want to be a part of the program to be successful. Young people who struggle academically or socially need to clearly understand what the program they are signing up for entails. While it is important to challenge our young people, we would not want to set them up to fail.

When we select young people for archdiocesan training, we must ask ourselves these questions and be honest with ourselves about the answers. We must also realize that the programs can only do what they are designed to do. We cannot expect that a program will help “fix” a young person. All of our programs are designed to foster the personal and spiritual growth of young people with respect to the content each program covers.

We need to trust ourselves and really look to what is best for the young person, and for our program.

Lastly and perhaps most importantly, we need to be ready for the young person to return. When we send a young person away for training we, as Youth Ministry Coordinators need to be ready for them when they return energized and full of enthusiasm. They will have new skills, new knowledge, and new ideas. We need to be ready to support and continue to nurture those ideas.

If you have, any questions about a young person you are considering for leadership training do not hesitate to contact us at 410-547-5372.