

Master Planning and the Needs of Youth Ministry

On a recent summer's evening, about 50 parishioners gathered in the social hall on a Tuesday night. Everyone was smiling and happy, greeting one another; people of all ages had come together for a special event.

On this night, a group of teens from our parish Youth Ministry program stood up in front of those gathered to share the details of their experience at a work camp in Jamaica. Not Jamaica, Queens, but Jamaica, the Caribbean island, known for its appeal to tourists, and for tremendous poverty that exists not far from the resorts.

Each young person took their turn at the microphone to share their experiences. Clearly the work that they had done changed them, and in ways that were distinct and sometimes surprising, their faith had deepened. If we consider that faith education among those in that age group is enhanced by experience, a significant amount of teaching had been caught on their mission journey. This is how our parish and the Church at large, continues to grow and flourish.

As a parish community we have been blessed with a growing vibrant Youth Ministry program for our teenagers. Our Youth Ministry happens along side of, and in addition to our Faith Formation efforts. This structure affords our young people a chance to develop and deepen their faith in community, through prayerful service, leadership training, and social interaction. At Saint Edward's, Youth Ministry began in 2005. Like everything else at our parish, it has experienced explosive growth, which brings us many opportunities as well as some challenges.

In exploring the particular needs for Youth Ministry, the Master Planning Committee had to explore the unique needs of this group. The goal of the parish is to find ways to support the growth and development of this vital ministry. These are the young and committed Catholics who will grow into the adult parishioners of the future. This is how lives are transformed and we keep the flame of faith alive by passing it on.

One of the key elements of Youth Ministry is a "place" to be. Currently, we do not have a place that can be called a Youth Center. This includes space for the teens to gather for programs, rituals, service preparation, and training. As with everything else at our parish, the double-edged source of too much of a good thing presents us with a challenge. Our busy parish facilities often means that Youth Ministry does not always have the space that is needed for meaningful service and activities. In a pattern similar to the one used for looking at how we can create adaptable and flexible space for Faith Formation, the Master Plan is doing the same for Youth Ministry.

Space needed for our young people to gather for events that range from social events, meetings, retreats, speakers, and more. If the Spirit can move up to 150 teenagers to come together in faith-based activities, our responsibility as a worship community is to create appropriate space for these activities to occur.

As with Faith Formation, no one could have imagined the rapid technological growth that we live with today. The integration of technology as part of Youth Ministry remains a top priority. In addition, the Youth Center space that we hope to create will have its own technological priorities, including space for study, sharing experiences, and creative enjoyment.

Our Youth Ministry program, like Faith requires many tools to engage our youth. This will require numerous supplies, tools, and other materials. Practical, accessible, efficient storage is an important component of our plans.

Immediately upon moving into the new worship space, just as with Faith Formation, we free up much current space for use by our Youth Ministry program also. We will not need to wait until subsequent phases to have our youth see significant progress in what is being provided to them through their Faith Formation and Youth programs at Saint Edward's.

If you have any further questions about our Faith Formation or Youth Center plans, please review the materials on our parish website (www.stedwardsny.org) or contact a member of the Master Planning Committee.