

Quick Guide to Setting up the Youth Council

Getting started

- 1) Review the document, "How to Start a Parish Youth Council." (Just for guidance. Take it or leave it.)
- 2) Advertise to your youth.
- 3) Allow your youth to apply; Invite youth if you need to; have elections if you have a large youth group and feel this is the best way to build it. I would try to stay at 12 members or less for large youth communities. A minimum of 4 members is good for a small youth community.
- 4) Have those who join (by whatever means) sign the commitment form (optional at your discretion, but I encourage it).
- 5) Schedule your first meeting.
- 6) Do not invite other adults to help. See number 2 below.

At the first meeting

- 1) Set the tone right from the start. Establish that the council is "their council." Therefore, the adults will not contribute much and will allow the youth to lead (adults will support as needed).
- 2) Let the council choose who the other adult member(s)/sponsor(s) will be. They should be allowed to choose with whom they feel comfortable.
- 3) Let the council decide which if any offices the council will include in addition to President and Vice-President and have an "internal election" for each office. I recommend letting the council members decide not the larger community.
- 4) Have the President fill out the Diocesan Youth Council Registration Form and send back via email. This is if the youth wish for their council to be a chapter of the larger diocesan youth council. If it is not returned, the council will not be affiliated with the diocesan organization, which is perfectly fine, I'm just making this clear.
- 5) Let the council establish some preliminary by-laws and make sure to document them in some formal way that the youth can access. More by-laws can be established as needed as issues arise. One example would be deciding what kind of attendance is expected and what will happen if someone does not live up to the rule. (**Note:** Teach the youth to be merciful with issues like this, but also to hold each other accountable. This would be where a youth minister might play "referee" if they see by-laws being set that are obviously too strict or unrealistic. Correct with guiding questions, not mandates.)
- 6) Let the youth schedule council meetings for the rest of the year. People need to be able to plan. I can tell you from experience, if you schedule week to week or month to month, you won't like the results.

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- 7) Discuss what the council will do. The document, “How to Start a Parish Youth Council” will be very helpful with this.
- 8) Let things grow naturally. This is the beginning, it doesn’t have to be perfect from the start, and it will get better.

Other suggestions

- 1) Let the youth do absolutely everything possible. Remember, this is their council.
- 2) Always take attendance and maintain a record of it. (This is not really a suggestion. You really must do this for safety reasons, etc.)
- 3) Always begin and end meetings with youth leading prayer.
- 4) Always have an agenda in advance and try to stick to it. If there is extra time, other topics can be brought up but if you don’t have an agenda and stick to it, you will end up wasting a lot of time.
- 5) Establish a way to communicate (GroupMe, Flocknote, Email, etc.). I recommend GroupMe as the primary way so that discussions can be had outside of meetings. I STRONGLY recommend implementing Flocknote for all aspects of communication in your youth community and larger parish. (If you haven’t noticed, I am not going to stop beating that drum. 😊)
- 6) Establish a youth to be the “Sergeant at Arms” whose sole responsibility is to keep people focused on the topics (people are going to get distracted).
- 7) Intentionally work on building community among the members. They may not all start off as friends, or even knowing each other. It is vital that they get to know each other and feel comfortable having open discussions. Icebreakers and other activities can help with this.
- 8) Make a HUGE announcement to your parish about who the new youth council members are and what the council will do. Put the pictures and short biographies in the bulletin, email it out, etc. etc. etc., be creative with this.