

The following talk is one that I have used in parishes across the Diocese to invite people into ministry with youth. There is not a single parish that I have been to where people have not responded generously with their time and talent. Please feel free to personalize the talk and use it to grow ministry volunteers for youth ministry. You will also want to pass at the form “It Takes a Whole Parish” to get people to sign up during the masses on the weekend you give this presentation (give out pencils as well or make sure they are in the pew). The best time to give this presentation during mass is after a brief homily. The pastor/associate usually gives a 3 minute homily and then turns it over to me. My presentation is referred to as a reflection after the homily. You can do this at the end of mass but it isn’t as effective. People are already thinking of getting out and some people have already left.

## Youth Sunday Talk

Good morning, I'm Kevin Prevou. I have served for the past nine years as the Director of Youth Ministry and Adolescent Catechesis for the Diocese of Fort Worth. Previously, I spent about seventeen years in parish youth ministries in San Antonio and Houston. Prior to that, I was a teenager growing up in San Antonio in Holy Name parish on the Southside of town. The thing that I remember so vividly was that the faith community of Holy Name recognized gifts in me and encouraged me to use those gifts for the community. I was a catechist for the St. Peter St. Joseph orphanage, I visited people in the nursing home in our neighborhood every other week, I became director of the youth choir at the tender age of 15, and I served on the youth retreat team until I graduated from high school. Every bit of ministry that I share today is due in whole to the ministry I was invited into as a teenager from Holy Name Church.

Today, I would like to talk with you about your young people, and about Catholic youth ministry.

Youth ministry is the response of the Christian community to the needs of our young people, and the sharing of the unique gifts of youth with the whole community. By answering the needs of youth, the community in turn receives a wealth of gifts that can only be given by youth. **The giving and receiving between youth and community is youth ministry.**

**Catholic Youth ministry** today has several basic goals named in the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 1997 document called: RENEWING THE VISION: A FRAMEWORK FOR CATHOLIC YOUTH MINISTRY. First, it tries to **develop the total person**. Youth ministry is concerned with every aspect of young people's lives. It aims to foster and support the growth of each individual. Second, Youth ministry seeks to **encourage young people to accept responsibility in the life, mission and work of the Catholic faith community**. And third, Youth Ministry seeks to **empower young people to live as disciples of**

**Jesus Christ in our world today.** Not when they grow up and become an adult, but to begin to act as a disciple of Jesus Christ today using their gifts that the community has helped them to identify.

Because youth ministry is to youth, with youth, by youth, and for youth, **both adults and teens play key leadership roles.** We need everyone in the parish to recognize their part toward involving young people in the parish. Some parishes think that someone needs to be hired to “do youth ministry” or that a volunteer person from the parish will “do youth ministry”. But that won’t work today!

Sr. Thea Bowman, is one of the heroes of Catholic youth ministry. She adapted the phrase "It takes a Whole Church" from the Ghanaian proverb "It takes a village to raise a child." She helped communities look beyond a leader and see themselves as part of the community serving youth. By learning and ministering side by side with adults and children of the parish community, youth will grow as disciples. This takes leadership.

In a children's story called "**Stone Soup**," a community discovers its wealth in sharing. In one version of the story, *a town anticipates that a group of hungry soldiers will be coming through. Each family hides the parcel of food they have left. One family puts the carrots they have saved under the bed. Another family hides the chicken in the cellar. Yet another family snuggles potatoes beneath the floor boards. Two soldiers who come through town are longing for a meal and for a chance to share a story. They are told that there is nothing to share. One soldier tells the town folks that everything is all right because in his travels he has learned of a meal that he can make any time he needs it. He asks for a large pot filled with water. He builds a fire under the pot and places some large stones in the water.*

*As the water heats, he shares with the crowd gathered around him about the wonderful stew cooking in this pot. The people are spellbound by his tale. He tastes the soup. After savoring a spoonful, he remarks, "this would be just right if only we had a few carrots." A woman leaves the gathering and rushes to her home to retrieve the treasured carrots so she could add just a few to the pot. After another taste, he declares, "Oh, a few potatoes would really bring the taste out in this soup." A father goes back to his home to fetch the potatoes. The soldier continues, describing the wonderful soup and requesting just a few bits of food to add. When the soup is almost done, he mentions that a meal as special as this is properly finished with music and dance, "too bad, there is no one who can play a fiddle in this town." The townspeople scramble to their homes, some bring out dishes, others chairs and cloths to sit on. One man finds a fiddle and one woman finds a flute. And so the feast begins.*

*After a satisfying meal, the whole town joins in song and dance and smiles cover their faces for the first time in a long time. What started as stone soup became a community meal when everyone shared. When the soldiers left, they gave the stones that started the soup to the town leaders who promised that they would make stone soup each year on this day. The soldiers wanted the town to remember that there would always be enough when everyone shared what they had.*

As we approach our ministry with young people, we can be like the community that thought there was nothing to share. We do not always know how to be with and share with the young people in our communities.

In our communities we often rely upon one or a few leaders to be with our young people during their adolescence. We have assumed that someone must be uniquely talented to work with youth or that one must be close to the young person in age and must be "cool." This would mean that for any of us our greatest ability to work with youth peaked when we were eighteen years of age. This talent diminished every day thereafter. And to make things more difficult, some of us have never been "cool." So we convince ourselves that there is a scarcity: We just have not found the right person. We do not have the right facilities to gather youth. We do not have resources like the church next door.

Like the town that shared the feast of stone soup, faith communities everywhere are looking to the resources within their own communities to discover a wealth they share with youth. Our communities have many talents and gifts to share. People of all ages and varied experiences have something to share with this generation. Much of youth ministry is caring about youth, and the good old-fashioned work of organizing and getting people to work together. Parishes are finding ways to integrate youth into the life of the community itself. This is our first treasure. Parishes are looking to connect ministry with youth to the family at home. This is another treasure. Parishes are inviting people of all ages who are faithful and who care about youth to join in the effort by sharing what they can. Our community itself is a treasure chest of resources waiting to become engaged in ministry with youth.

A youth ministry effort is now being set up here in St. Mary's parish. I have committed myself to work with St. Mary's as long as necessary to bring the gifts of the community together so that a powerful ministry with young people can be developed. We have a first meeting planned for this coming Wednesday, 7pm at the parish. Who should come? Everyone who cares about young people including young people, parents, empty nesters, grand parents to name a few. What will happen at the meeting? I will outline Catholic Youth Ministry today as laid out by the American Bishops, give people a chance to ask questions and get the answers they need. Finally, I will lay out a plan to develop a **doable** youth ministry in the parish over the next 6 months. Everyone there will be given an opportunity to say how they want to be involved in youth ministry over the next year. Those people who want to participate in the organization phase will be invited to a follow-up meeting to get started on the actual planning. Everyone else will be contacted as the program actually gets going which should be some time this summer.

Everyone was given a small stone as you entered church today. Instead of a "worry stone", this is a "Prayer Stone". Put it in your pocket and bring it everywhere you go. Pray for the youth in this parish and ask God what part you should play in the soup we are stirring called "youth ministry". Then bring your stone to the meeting on Wednesday as your way of saying, "I can't do it all or alone – but I can do my part. We will use them in our prayer service. Thanks for letting me speak with you and see you Wednesday.