

YOUTH MINISTRY

ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST

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THE LAW OF THE LORD IS PERFECT PSALM 19

Protecting God's Children

Youth Ministry is about keeping kids safe. It is top priority. For some the laws of God and His Church are restrictive. For others the laws of God and the Church are protective.

God, our Father wills for us only the best. The best is heaven. Not as the world gives does He give to us. If we live our lives in the world *for* the world we gain the world. If we live lives in the world *for* the next life, we have the hope of eternal life. We are *in* the world, but not *of* the world.

God's children have been entrusted to our care. Yet, because of all there is out in the world today, we, as parents cannot watch our kids close enough. They *will* get hurt and *be* hurt and *they* will also hurt another. All we are able to do as parents, is to watch over them as close as we can, to let them know we are there for them, that they can talk to us, that we will listen to them, we will pray for them, and show - by our example—moral behavior.

No matter how much we do or how close we keep watch, our kids can get caught up, often innocently, into at-risk behaviors. All kids, *all people* are subject to sin. That is our human nature. When our kids mess up, when *we* mess up, we have a loving Father who in his infinite mercy forgives us. Thank you, Father, for the gift of your Church and the Sacraments.

Active Listening Skills

- ◇ Make eye contact when speaking and listening to a child or young person
- ◇ Repeat what he or she has said to you "so what you are saying to me is..."
- ◇ Respond with complete sentences
- ◇ Clarify the meaning of the young persons' statement. Ask follow up questions.
- ◇ Check to make certain the person understands what you are saying.
- ◇ Pay attention to body language
- ◇ Remind a young person that they can tell you anything without being judged.
- ◇ Ask open ended questions. If 'yes/no' questions are asked the conversation will be shortened and the person may feel that they didn't get to communicate with you.

**Holy Mary,
You are
my spiritual
mother.
Be with me
today. Protect
me and guide
me with your
love. Show me
how to follow
your Son, Jesus,
in everything I
do and say.
Amen**



A Personal Faith in Jesus Christ and the Church is Not Guaranteed

Do you remember when the Sacrament of Confirmation was celebrated in the fourth or fifth grade? Then eighth grade? Then tenth, eleventh, and even twelfth grades? The Sacrament of Confirmation was being *used* to guarantee young people's attendance in religious education until an older age.

Some would argue that it indeed worked. Our "**numbers**" in religious education programs and in the mandatory two year Confirmation programs were higher than that of our youth programs today. Yet???

Are people confirmed at older ages active members of the Catholic Church today? Delaying a Sacrament does not guarantee a personal faith in Jesus Christ. Delaying a Sacrament does not guarantee belief and active membership in the Catholic Church. Nor do mandatory programs guarantee a personal faith in Jesus Christ and in his Church.

Restoring the order of the Sacraments had great potential. We would develop youth ministry processes in which we would help to form our young people with a personal faith in Jesus and in his Church. Young people would no longer attend mandatory classes in order to receive a Sacrament.

Rather, young people would be active members of viable youth ministry programs. They would participate because they wanted to, because they wanted to learn about Jesus and his Church, because they chose to follow the way of Jesus. They wanted to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Except, something went wrong. Many parishes could not develop viable youth programs. The "numbers" of young people attending religious education programs had declined once a child had received the Sacraments.

The three Sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are the FOUNDATION of our faith. But, not the entire faith.

Children are fully initiated into the faith at the age of reason, which is about seven years old. At seven, they are able to reason that Christ is fully present, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity in the Eucharist. They are able to reason what is right from what is wrong.

Having received the Sacraments is *the beginning* of their formation process not the end. Sacraments enable them to continue on in the way of faith. It is possible now.

Fully initiated Catholic Christians are *expected* to change. Yet, that change is not based on age but, desire and will. The change is individual and personal.

In youth ministry, we partner up with parents. We develop and provide a YM program thereby assisting parents to form their kids in the faith. We reinforce all the good things already being taught in the home.

As parents we make our kids do what is good for them; to give them what they need. We make them eat, bathe, often we make them go to school, go to bed, get up, do chores, and yes, we make them go to Mass.

Nine out of ten young people are made to attend religious for-

mation and youth ministry activities. Possibly only one in ten young persons chooses to attend on their own. And quite often the one who chose to take part did so for social reasons.

We help them to make good healthy choices. We help them to establish good habits in order to become productive and responsible adult Catholic citizens.

However, like the Church, parents cannot make their children have a personal faith in Jesus Christ and in the Church.

There—~~are~~—no—guarantees. A personal faith in Jesus and in his Church is individual and unique to each person; each having been given free will.

Individually we grow and develop, each at our own pace. It is a personal and individual decision to become fully active and conscious participants in the life of the Catholic Church.

For some the personal decision to follow Christ and the Church happens easily, early, and naturally. For others it comes later. Fully initiated, it is no longer a decision to receive a sacrament but, to live your life in such a way that ETERNITY is now our goal. Sacraments give us the grace needed to make good healthy decisions and strengthens us for the road ahead.

As parents we can choose to lead our kids on the path of discipleship; a disciple of Jesus Christ and of the Church. Together, we can equip our kids with what it takes to make a personal decision to follow Jesus. Together—we can shoulder the responsibility—yolked to the Christ, whose burden is LIGHT!