

# ALPHA YOUTH SERIES: GUIDANCE FOR PARISHES

## Guiding Principles for the Implementation of AYS



Offices of RE | YM and Parish Evangelization

## MAIN POINTS OF DOCUMENT

- Recommendations for a successful implementation of AYS within a Catholic discipleship context. (page 4)
- “The good news is that some parishes that offered the Alpha Youth Series (AYS) saw great fruit. Indeed, some parish leaders have said that the disposition of their faith formation (FF) students went from, ‘Why I am here?’ to ‘When is the next AYS session?’ Yet, the reality is that AYS ‘alone’ is not sufficient to bring about ongoing conversion for their FF students.” (page 3)
- “Integrating AYS (for 13 weeks or so) will require parishes to look closely at their FF|RE program for that year to see how they can best offer AYS and follow it with an engaging, evangelizing catechesis that naturally flows from AYS and offers content from the religious education standards.” (page 2)
- “The diocese continues to promote a complete and authentic faith formation for our youth as found in the religious education standards of the Diocese of Green Bay. Integrating AYS (for 13 weeks or so) will require parishes to look closely at their FF|RE program...” (page 2)

The hope of Diocese of Green Bay for all people, including youth of the diocese, is to encounter Christ in a personal and life-transforming way! With this, we are fully aware of the urgency that parishes feel in moving forward with discipleship-based initiatives in their faith formation programs. The well-documented decline of middle school and high school faith formation enrollment is sobering. As such, some parishes are moving forward with the Alpha Youth Series (AYS) to help their faith formation students encounter Jesus in a personal way; most especially for middle school and high school students.



Faith formation | religious education has a lot of moving parts. A successful integration of AYS into religious education curriculum is vitally important. The diocesan offices of RE |YM, Family Ministry and Parish Evangelization are here to assist with the integration of AYS within a faith formation context.

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Revising the policy by the Diocese of Green Bay will include reassessing how the benchmarks of religious education and ACRE testing (just to name a few) fit into a discipleship-based faith formation process. Even though bench marks of religious education | faith formation are still in force, we know that the parishes that have decided to move forward with the AYS- *taking three months out of the school year to implement the course*—will have to prioritize what bench marks to achieve and how to achieve them during the remainder of the school year.

At this point in time (pending an official policy regarding AYS), we want to provide assistance for those parishes that are exploring the use AYS for their religious education.

## **PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS**

AYS should always be implemented fully as it is intended. When AYS is offered in a piecemeal fashion, its full effect on youth is compromised. In other words, by selectively using parts of the Alpha Youth Series and thus omitting some key components (i.e. prayer, food or refreshments, certain videos, open and honest discussion, etc.), AYS is not as effective in reaching a person’s heart. It would be a shame for a parish leader to say, “We tried AYS and it doesn’t work” because it was not implemented fully or appropriately. This would unnecessarily discourage other parishes from using it.

A second and very important consideration is this: What is your parish planning to do once the AYS has concluded? The good news is that some parishes that offered AYS saw great fruit. Indeed, some parish leaders have said that the disposition of their faith formation (FF) students went from, “Why I am here?” to “When is the next AYS session?” Yet, the reality is that AYS “alone” is not sufficient to bring about ongoing conversion for their FF students. The transition from AYS to FF|RE must be well thought out by the parish. Going from a dialogical (i.e. interactive) model of AYS to a classroom or lecture style could be abrasive and hence turn off our youth. On the other hand, integrating the principles and style of AYS in a faith formation program (prayer, witness and dialogue) could enhance the RE experience and foster an encounter with Christ as experienced in AYS.

With this in mind, the proclamation of the Gospel in the context of everyday life *and* meeting the pastoral needs of your FF students’ needs to continue after AYS has concluded. As Everett Fritz, author of *The Art of Forming Young Disciples*, said, “If youth ministry at the parish doesn’t meet a young person’s primary pastoral needs, then youth ministry is not happening!” (page 26) The same can be said of faith formation! In fact, this may require the recruitment of mentors and breaking down faith formation classes into smaller groups.

What are the pastoral needs of teenagers that need to be on our radar? Fritz specifies them in his book (pages 32-39):

1. The need to be understood
2. The need to belong
3. The need to be transparent
4. The need for critical thinking about the faith
5. The need for guidance



To be sure, AYS provides the opportunity for these pastoral needs to be met; but once the AYS course has concluded, the catechist must continue to integrate these pastoral priorities into their faith formation curriculum. After all, if parish-based faith formation programs continue to treat faith formation “only” as a subject matter, then faith formation students will act accordingly. They will leave the parish behind as they would their high school; only to come back on rare or special occasions.

## **AYS BEST PRACTICES**

For the best results in implementing AYS, consider the following recommendations. Keep in mind that this list of recommendations is by no means exhaustive.

## AYS-Prep

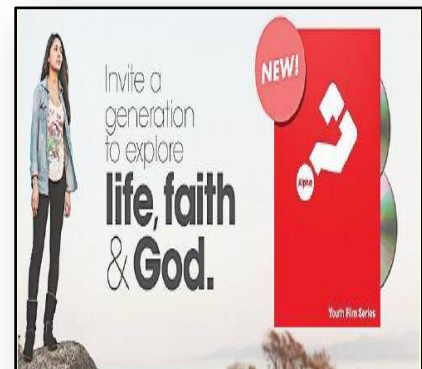
- Ask anyone who is passionate about your ministry to pray for all of the catechists and FF students (by name) who will be involved in the AYS.
- Offering AYS sessions for 13 consecutive weeks is more effective than offering it on a bi-weekly or monthly schedule.

Determine what your FF students like for refreshments and provide them before the videos are presented.

- Preview each video prior to the class and consider using the questions that each AYS episode features during the episode for your discussion questions (have these discussion questions ready for each class).

## AYS Sessions

- Prior to viewing the videos (this, as FF students are enjoying the refreshments), catechists can touch base with their FF students by asking them how their week went and what challenges and successes they experienced during the week.
- Help students to work through any skepticism, concerns or questions they may have regarding the faith and AYS material during the discussions. They need to wrestle with these deep issues of life and faith.
- Try to discover Scripture verses either featured in the AYS videos or ones that are related to the themes. Use them for discussion or a concluding prayer.
- Between video | session 6 (Why and how do I read the bible?) and video | session 10 (How do I resist evil?), consider an Alpha-Day-Away where the following videos can be displayed:
  - Who is the Holy Spirit and what does he do?
  - How can I be filled with the Holy Spirit?
  - How can I make the most of the rest of my life?
    - For a sample of what an Alpha-Day-Away can look like, click [here](#).



- For AYS session, “What about the church?” the Diocese of Green Bay prefers that a Catholic video be used (i.e. Decision Point or Encounter) or that the catechist or a parishioner gives witness to why his or her parish is an important part of their discipleship journey. Keep in mind that the discipleship process is not complete without an encounter of Christ in the Eucharist.
- For the session- Does God heal today? Consider having someone give a testimony of being healed by the Lord. Also consider having FF students pray with or for each other for the expressed purpose of healing...and see what happens!

### **CAN YOU HELP US HELP OTHERS?**

1. If your parish does proceed with the AYS this school year, please provide us with feedback on how it went. What were the challenges and successes?
2. Share with us plans for integrating AYS into your faith formation curriculum. How do you plan on integrating discipleship practices into religious education?

With your feedback, the Diocese of Green Bay will be in a much better position to assist parishes that will use AYS in the future. Thank you and God bless the work you are doing for Jesus Christ and his Church.

For free access to the AYS videos without having to register your course, email Joe Tremblay with the subject heading, “Add me to your team.” And he will have the Alpha website send you a link for all 13 videos.

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