



**YOUTH AND FAMILY MINISTRIES
ASSESSMENT REPORT**

for

**St. Mark's Episcopal Church
Washington, DC**

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Overview

St. Mark's Episcopal Church is an urban parish on Capitol Hill with approximately 250 individuals worshipping weekly. The interim director of youth and family ministries began in February 2019 and was moved to this position permanently in April of 2020. Now, on the other side of a season of staff transition, the church is eager to gain clarity for the long-term vision, leadership structure, and sustainability of the ministry. A strong desire also exists to better engage and equip volunteers, so they enjoy fulfilling an effective ministry with the church's young people.

Ministry Architects was invited to partner with St. Mark's to review the current ministries for youth and families, and to propose a path forward that will build sustainable systems and clarity of purpose that addresses any existing concerns and makes room for deep impact ministry at St. Mark's. At the beginning of this process, the rector explained, "We're always reactive and would like to become proactive, especially with our youth." This is the first step in helping the youth and family ministries of this church become just that, and more.

Background

Programs for children, youth and families are served by numerous areas of the church. However, for the purposes of this report two principal areas of focus are:

- Youth and Family Ministries (Y&FM)
- The Christian Education Sunday School Program

Historically, the Youth and Family Ministries program at St. Mark's has been responsible for programs outside of Sunday School, including special youth events and teen programs, Confirmation classes, and Children's Chapel. The Christian education Sunday school program provides Sunday school classes for children age three through senior high school.

Saint Mark's Church has a rich tradition of youth related Sunday school programming that has been lay led for approximately 60 years through the St. Mark's Christian education program, sometimes referred to as one of the Saint Mark's pillars. This program area is and has been led by volunteer Christian education co-directors of which there are usually two, though at some points there have been 3-4 co-directors due to the multiple responsibilities of the Christian education program which goes beyond Sunday school to include adult classes, Bible studies, and book discussions in addition to other related activities.

As the system supporting Sunday school for children and youth, the Christian education program is responsible for the following tasks:

- Recruiting teachers for the Sunday school program for ages 3 to 17
- Articulating the mission of the Sunday school program as described in the annual Christian education catalogue
- Facilitating input and decision-making for the Sunday school curriculum
- Ensuring supplies for the Sunday school program
- Managing the budget line items for the program



- Drafting and publishing the Christian education catalog that describes the children & youth Sunday school program and the youth and family ministries calendar
- Coordination with clergy, the diocese and the director of youth and family ministries to ensure that Safeguarding God's Children training sessions are regularly held and that all Sunday school teachers have been trained in the appropriate interaction with children and youth
- Organizing the registration of young people for the Sunday School year

The Sunday School program is divided into the three following sub-groups:

- The Catechesis program for ages 3 through 11 (pre-school through 5th grade)
- Middle School (grades 6-8)
- Senior High (grades 9-12)

The Catechesis approach was instituted as a response to the needs of parishioners, parents, and families who desired a program suited to children ages 3 through 11 that provided an education in Christian lore but also delivered a values based, experiential learning process similar to the Montessori educational approach.

During the 2019-2020 school year, the director of youth and family ministries was also the lead teacher for the senior high Sunday school class, continuing lay teaching he began in 2017-18 before he assumed his current position. Being the lead senior high teacher is not a requirement of his current position but it has proven to be highly advantageous. Were the youth director unable or unwilling to teach, it would be the responsibility of the CE directors to recruit a lead teacher and teaching team as they do for Catechesis and middle school.

Until September 2019, the middle and senior high school program, was taught in line with St. Mark's long-time functional education approach following the philosophy of theologian and educator Charles Penniman. Responding to the desires of teachers, parents, and parishioners and in the spirit of growing and improving the program, the current co-directors instituted a new curriculum, Teen Text, with one curricula tailored to middle school and one tailored to senior high, after consultation with the lead teachers. Teen Text is a curriculum created by the Episcopal sponsored Education Center in North Carolina and follows the Episcopal liturgical calendar while incorporating issues-based discussions that foster values. The advantage of the new program is that it provides teachers with a set curriculum from which to teach each Sunday as well as engaging activities for students.

The Christian education co-directors and the middle and senior high lead teachers receive each month's curricula prior to the start of the month. The previous functional education approach required the teachers to create a new lesson plan each week which was reported as cumbersome. 2019 was the first year that the current Teen Text curricula was used and while it continues to be evaluated as a new approach, there has been a favorable response from teachers and students, although no comprehensive evaluation has yet been done.

Finally, other pillars at St. Mark's Church often involve youth and families in relevant activities:



- Outreach – can involve young people depending upon the activity.
- Arts – has included St. Mark's Player (theater) dance studio, which can offer opportunities for children and youth.
- Parish Life – includes a myriad of affinity groups, social events, and miscellaneous activities that can also benefit children and youth.

Each of the above has a lay leader or co-leader whereas youth and family ministries is under the direction of the youth director except in those years when a youth director is not on staff. In such a situation, parishioners will fulfill the youth programming responsibilities.

Worship has also been a traditional pillar but is under the purview of the clergy though supported by a host of lay leaders who fulfill the roles of vergers, beadles, readers, music, and altar guild. This also is a vital area of involvement for children and youth with even more potential.

Assessment Report

Twenty people participated in an online diagnostic for children's ministry and/or youth ministry and responses were collected over a month and a half from late April to mid-June. While there is clear overlap and collaboration between Christian education and youth and family ministries at St. Mark's, the individuals who participated in the online diagnostic were not asked to distinguish between the two, and instead were simply asked for their feedback on any/all programs, events, etc. related to children, youth, and families. However, for clarity moving forward, this report will be focused on youth and family ministries, and not Christian education, except where noted. So what follows is a list of currently identified assets in the ministry to protect and maximize, and a list of known challenges that exist and will need to be addressed. Each of these are based on interviews with the staff and parishioners, and feedback from online diagnostic participants. Additionally, recommendations to address each challenge have been made along with a timeline in which they can be accomplished.



Norms

As the ministry leadership steps into this process, four rules of thumb – “norms” – will be helpful to keep in mind for each ministry area we are addressing. These are not necessarily targets for success; they are simply what an average church typically experiences.

Children’s Ministry Norms

- 1) 15% of the Worshiping Congregation:** In a typical church, the size of the children’s ministry tends to settle at a number that is around 15% of the worshiping congregation.
- 2) \$1,100 per Child:** In a typical church, the budget dedicated to children’s ministry (including program budget, staff salaries, and benefits) averages \$1,100 per active child in the ministry.
- 3) 1 Full-Time Staff Person for Every 70 Children:** In a typical church, the equivalent of one full-time staff person can sustain the weekly participation of up to 70 children.
- 4) 1 Adult for Every 5 Children:** Ministry Architects likes to think in terms of “spans of care,” recognizing that, realistically, most volunteers cannot effectively oversee the church’s Christian nurture of more than about five children on an ongoing basis. In a typical church, one adult volunteer is necessary to sustain the engagement of about every five children involved in the ministry.

Youth Ministry Norms

- 1) 10% of the Worshiping Congregation:** In a typical church, the size of the youth ministry tends to settle at a number that is around 10% of the worshiping congregation.
- 2) \$1,500 per Youth:** In a typical church, the budget dedicated to youth ministry (including program budget, staff salaries, and benefits) averages \$1,500 per youth.
- 3) 1 Full-Time Staff Person for Every 50 Youth:** In a typical church, the equivalent of one full-time staff person can sustain the weekly participation of up to 50 youth in the life of the church.
- 4) 1 Adult for Every 5 Youth:** Ministry Architects likes to think in terms of “spans of care,” recognizing that, realistically, most volunteers cannot effectively oversee the church’s Christian nurture of more than about five youth on an ongoing basis. In a typical church, one adult volunteer is necessary to sustain the engagement of about every five youth involved in the ministry.



Assets to Protect

Strengths to keep in the current ministry.

Climate

In general, people at St. Mark's are enthusiastic about the youth and family ministries at the church, and hopeful about its future. There is a foundation of joy and confidence in the ministry, which is clear through the commitment many have to wanting things to be even better for the children, youth, and families moving forward. A positive climate allows good decisions to be made quickly, and an investment in the ministry – in funding, staff, and volunteers - to come more easily.

Committed Volunteers

There is a core group of volunteers that is devoted to the youth and family ministries at St. Mark's. These volunteers have served consistently for many years and seem to be well-known and well-liked by many in the ministry, and at the church. There is clearly a need for more volunteers, and new volunteers, but there is an excellent foundation in place and is ready for growth.

Care for Staff

With a series of staff changes over the past several years, the community is ardent about the emotional, spiritual, and physical health of the director of youth and family ministries, with the desire that the current staff person's tenure will be long and fruitful. There is strong support for Sabbath time, continuing education opportunities, performance evaluations, and networks of support, all of which increase the likelihood of having an effective staff person who stays for the long haul.

Rites of Passage

Rites of passage are the special moments in which the church seeks to mark transitions in the lives of children and youth, making the ordinary holy or sacred. And St. Mark's is doing this very well. Baptism, Confirmation, the youth service, and service trips are examples of the excellent way this church community is intentionally lifting up young people, offering support and guidance, in these times of change. These are valued traditions that people look back on fondly and look forward to expectantly.

Communication

The children, youth, and parents at St. Mark's are receiving regular communication in multiple formats about the upcoming events and programs offered ministry, as well as a multitude of resources for families to use as tools for faith formation beyond the life of the church. It is clear that both families and the congregation as a whole are well-informed about all that is available and happening with and in this ministry.



Challenges to Address

Obstacles to moving the current ministry strategically forward.

Volunteer Expectations

Although the existing volunteers for the ministry are dedicated, they appear to be unclear of their expectations as volunteers. Volunteers serve at their best when they know what is expected of them and what to expect from the program/ministry they serve. Job descriptions, for both weekly/regular volunteers and special event volunteers, do not exist, and thus there is a lack of clarity around what is expected when, and for how long. This results in volunteers who, at best, are uncertain if they are doing the job they should be doing.

Volunteer Recruitment

Currently, the work of the youth and family ministries at St. Mark's is primarily done by the staff and the small, core group of committed volunteers. But more volunteers are greatly needed and there doesn't appear to be any type of systematic plan in place to find these volunteers. A clear recruiting strategy will be required to find all the volunteers needed to successfully run the ministry, and this process will take time as well as some re-culturing of the church's expectations for when volunteers agree to serve. The ones who thrive tend to be those who take their volunteer commitments seriously enough to plan several months ahead. Also, it will be difficult to grow the team unless the base of potential volunteers expands to include parents and members of the congregation not directly connected to the ministry currently.

Volunteer Equipping

While the faithfulness of the current team of volunteers is commendable, the team is lacking the guidance to serve with excellence. Volunteers need access to training and educational materials, to help them succeed in their roles and avoid frustration and burnout. Just like clear expectations are essential, intentional and consistent opportunities for volunteers to be coached and equipped is vital. Volunteers also seem unclear on the vision and goals of the ministry. When it remains unshared with the volunteer team it is predictably difficult for the volunteers to be on the same page and working towards the same ends.

Youth Programming

The youth and family ministry at St. Mark's seems to be missing the visible, effective programs that middle school and high school youth are in need of. There is a lack of clarity about who is responsible for youth Sunday school, and there is an absence of programming for youth beyond Sunday morning. With the busyness of teenagers these days and the access to modern technology, the desire exists for programs that enable this community to connect and grow on different days and times, and apart from needing to physically be at the church. This is a season in which the ministry needs to be open, creative, and intentional about its programming for the youth and their families.

Structural Tools

St. Mark's has done an adequate job tending to the foundational needs of the youth and family ministries but there are some structural pieces that are yet to be implemented effectively. A ministry will struggle to grow when a thorough framework has not been provided to support that



growth. The following items and systems appear to be either currently missing or not being implemented/used effectively: attendance tracking, major event notebooks, ministry manuals, calendar of events, and a directory/database of children, youth, and families. Until these are in place it will be difficult for the ministry to run smoothly and achieve sustainability.

Lack of Vision

Undoubtedly, there are many individuals and families at St. Mark's who care about and have a high investment in the youth and families ministry, but most are far from clear on the vision of the ministry. Some believe a mission statement exists but don't know it or can't remember it, while others simply think there isn't one. When a ministry lacks a clearly stated vision, anxiousness is often a predictable result. Without the consistent practice of long range goal setting and visioning, and the communication of these to the church community, individuals and families will continue to be unclear on the direction of the ministry and it will be difficult to evaluate and adjust the path forward as needed.

Follow Up

For the youth and families ministry at St. Mark's, an intentional process for checking in with missing children/youth and their families does not appear to be in place. While attendance seems to at least be taken at some events, this data is not being tracked or used to stay connected with families. This makes it challenging for volunteers and staff to adequately care for individuals. Unless processes are implemented that enable the ministry to regularly follow up with children and youth who have missed events or stopped participating, it will be near impossible to ensure that all in the community are being contacted regularly.

Connection to the Congregation

Several of the most popular and meaningful experiences for the children and youth at St. Mark's are those that connect them to the larger congregation, like the annual youth service and the monthly family service, and there is a strong desire for more of this from both the families and the church community. Drawing on the positive impact of those things, there is a hope for worship services to involve more children and youth in leadership roles, as well as strengthening the acolyte program, and children/youth choirs. Until there are more intergenerational opportunities for the whole church to be together, St. Mark's will continue to find it challenging to develop a richer, more diverse faith community, and help the children and youth integrate into the church in a way that will help lead to a lifelong commitment.

Recommendations

1. Reframe the next 12 months as a time for building long-term infrastructure for the ministry that will sustain the long-term success. Target June 2021 as the date when all of these recommendations have been put in place.
2. Establish a Youth and Families Ministry Renovation Team, made up of four to five volunteers. These non-anxious, goal-oriented people will free up the staff to focus on exceptional day-to-day ministry, while the Renovation Team ensures that the outcomes of this assessment are achieved.
3. Use July and August of 2020 to beta-test new, non-Sunday morning program options for the youth, including mid-week, offsite, and virtual gatherings. Plan to launch at least one new, ongoing non-Sunday morning event.
4. Meet with Christian Education leadership to clearly establish their responsibilities and expectations for Youth Sunday School moving forward, and create a plan to communicate this with volunteers, families, and the congregation.*
5. Create a calendar of events, as well as a preventative maintenance calendar, for the 2020-2021 school year, and build the necessary ministry manuals and major event notebooks associated with the programs and events on this calendar.
6. Begin the process of creating vision documents for the ministry and set up a system for annually reviewing these documents. This includes a mission statement, core values, and three-year goals (with one-year benchmarks).*
7. Determine ways for the children and youth to be more involved in the leading of worship services, as well as ideas for possible intergenerational gatherings at St. Mark's. Share these ideas with the staff and leadership of other ministry areas, to collaborate on and implement changes.*
8. Develop a clear plan for annual volunteer recruitment that includes the current list of volunteers, a fishing pond that is a list of potential volunteers for the ministry, and a record of everyone who has said "yes" for the upcoming school year.
9. Schedule four quarterly volunteer training events that include a volunteer kick-off in the fall, two opportunities for specific training to take place, and a volunteer appreciation event.
10. Draft volunteer job descriptions for each ministry role, including both weekly/regular volunteers and major event coordinators.
11. Create a personal contact plan for checking in with each individual volunteer in a meaningful way that both focuses on relationship building and helps inform upcoming trainings.
12. Develop a game plan for attendance tracking that includes an accurate count for each child/youth by name, at all weekly/regular programming and special events.
13. Review and update the youth and families ministry database with contact information, grades, and noting first-time visitors and children/youth who have been MIA.*
14. Develop a game plan to contact MIA children/youth and parents that demonstrates that they are valued, cared for, and missed.*
15. Ensure monthly coaching for the director of youth and family ministries that is focused on addressing the current needs and implementation of the game plans being developed.

* Denotes recommendations not currently included in the contract between St. Mark's and Ministry Architects.

Timeline



July 2020

- A Quick Start summit with the renovation team has taken place, to orient them to this report and begin their work.
- Three non-Sunday morning youth events have been scheduled and planned in both July and August, which incorporate different meeting locations, formats, and days/times.
- Coaching for the director of youth & family ministries has continued.

August

- A volunteer development summit with the renovation team has taken place, to address volunteer needs, plans for the 2020-2021 school year, and train the team in the volunteer recruiting process.
- An evaluation of the non-Sunday morning youth events offered in July and August has occurred, and a decision has been made on a plan/format to launch one new, non-Sunday morning, ongoing event for youth in the fall.
- A meeting has occurred with Christian Education leadership to outline their responsibilities and expectations for Youth Sunday School moving forward, and a plan has been created to communicate this with volunteers, families, and the congregation.
- A game plan for attendance tracking has been completed.
- A date for a fall volunteer training summit has been set.
- Coaching for the director of youth & family ministries has continued.

September

- A fall volunteer development summit has occurred, to kick-off the new year, which included job descriptions, the distribution/review of curriculum, guidelines, expectations, and calendar for the year.
- Five ways for children and youth to be more active and visible in the larger church, through worship services and intergenerational gatherings, have been brainstormed and decided on.
- The ministry's database has been reviewed and updated.
- Coaching for the director of youth & family ministries has continued.

October

- The youth & family ministries ministry manual has been reviewed and updated.
- A meeting with staff and other ministry area leaders has occurred to select three concrete ways for children and youth to be more active and visible in the larger church in the 2020-2021 school year.
- A plan for contacting MIA children/youth and parents has been completed.
- Coaching for the director of youth & family ministries has continued.

November



- A special meeting with the renovation team has occurred to discuss a mission statement for the ministry and decide on three-year goals, and one-year benchmarks for 2021, and these have been shared with ministry stakeholders.
- MIA students have been contacted and invited to children/youth programming.
- Coaching for the director of youth & family ministries has continued.

December

- Work has begun on Summer 2021 children's ministry calendar and programming.
- A preventative maintenance calendar has been created for the ministry.
- Coaching for the director of youth & family ministries has continued.

January 2021

- All current volunteer job descriptions have been reviewed and updated.
- A mid-year volunteer training, reflection, and evaluation event has taken place.
- A date for spring volunteer training has been set.
- Coaching for the director of youth & family ministries has continued.

February

- A list of potential volunteers for the ministry has added to the volunteer fishing pond.
- Volunteer job description are completed.
- A personal contact plan has been developed for volunteer check-in.
- Coaching for the director of youth & family ministries has continued.

March

- Current volunteers have been asked and have committed to volunteer for the upcoming school year.
- Spring volunteer training has been completed.
- Coaching for the director of youth & family ministries has continued.

April

- An annual volunteer recruitment plan for the upcoming school year has been developed and launched.
- The mission statement, three-year goals, and one-year benchmarks have been reviewed for achievement, and a date has been scheduled in November to evaluate and re-frame goals and benchmarks for 2022.
- Coaching for the director of youth & family ministries has continued.

May

- The calendar for the 2021-2022 school year has been completed, along with any associated major event notebooks.
- The current database has been reviewed and updated.
- Invitations have been sent to current/active participants in the ministry, and to all MIA children/youth, for summer programming.
- Coaching for the director of youth & family ministries has continued.

June



- A “Thank You” end of year celebration has taken place with volunteers.
- All volunteers (current and new) have been recruited for 2020-2021 school year.
- Coaching for the director of youth & family ministries has continued.



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