



"Youth Ministry for Life" *Help Sheet*
(for youth and family ministry leaders)

Discerning your call to youth and family ministry

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"
And I said, "Here am I; send me!" (Isaiah 6:8 NRSV)*

Highlights

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Those who have considered ministry with young people and families, and even some ministry veterans, undoubtedly pause from time-to-time to ask: Is this what God is calling me to do? By asking this question, you have begun discerning your call to ministry.

Discernment

Discernment is a process that involves acknowledging, exploring, and testing of the desire to serve:

- **Acknowledge**
The first step is to acknowledge your call. God speaks to God's people through a variety of means: prayer, opening opportunities, or the encouraging words of others.
- **Explore**
At this step, you need to explore your call. This will involve prayerful conversations with others, looking at past experiences, and naming spiritual gifts.

- **Test**
Test your call to serve by volunteering, considering the context of your ministry, or seeking further training.

What follows is a list of suggestions to assist you in discerning your call when you need to acknowledge, explore, or test your call at different stages of your ministry.

Entering ministry

This is the period in which you are considering whether or not to become engaged in youth and family ministry. (This section can also be helpful to those already in ministry who are assisting others in their discernment.)

Acknowledging

- Pray for and be attentive to God's leading. Ask others to pray with and for you
- Thank God for planting a desire within you.
- Take seriously others' comments about your gifts and passions.
- Consider past experiences and their present impact on you (camps, mission trips, Servant Events, relationships with caring adults, volunteering, parenting, etc.).
- Become actively involved in a local congregational worship setting.
- Journal your thoughts about feeling called.

Exploring

- Celebrate your desire to serve by telling others.
- Proclaim you are called to serve, and then discern where that may be.
- Study biblical stories of call and promise (Moses, Abraham and Sarah, Isaiah, Job, Mary, Timothy, etc.).
- Think of how God's people would be served through you.
- Seek out and speak with a faith mentor.
- Seek out and speak with someone currently working in youth and family ministry.
- Explore your spiritual gifts; determine what you are passionate about.
- Learn more about your preferred leadership style.
- Look at personality inventories and how they apply to ministry.
- Seek spiritual direction.
- Identify which context you would prefer to work in (congregation, camp, agency, etc.).
- Explore ministry possibilities that match your spiritual gifts and leadership style.
- Continue to pray.

Testing

- Take a class in an area that interests you that pertains to ministry (counseling, sociology, child development, teaching methods, program administration, etc.).
- Read new books, periodicals, and journals in the areas of youth ministry.
- Develop a relationship with someone in your congregation to be a "listening ear." Ask him or her to pray for your ministry.

- Develop a relationship with ministry colleagues outside your congregation.
 - Volunteer in a congregational youth ministry or agency; ask to use the spiritual gifts you have identified.
 - Look for open positions in your area of interest and imagine yourself in that role.
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Re-evaluating ministry

In the middle of a call, questions about your future arise: Is this the best place for me? Are my gifts being used? Is my work fulfilling? What do I need to do to “refresh?”

Acknowledging

- Determine if you feel called to continue in youth ministry or if you may be serving out of a sense of obligation.
- List the parts of your work that bring you joy and excitement, as well as those that cause frustration or burnout.
- Pay attention to restlessness or realities that may prompt you to another ministry.
- Search for ways to refresh your current ministry.
- Consider other ministry opportunities outside your current ministry.
- Honor any feelings you have about adjusting your ministry or going somewhere new.
- Share your feelings with a trusted mentor and seek advice.

Exploring

- Continue to explore tools listed under “Entering Ministry.”
- Seek mutual support from fellow youth ministry professionals or other persons in ministry.
- Identify what is most energizing for you in ministry.
- Identify what is happening in your life and work that indicates you should continue to be called to this work.
- Seek to change, grow, and explore new areas of ministry or interests.
- Volunteer outside the realm of your current employment to explore a new area or context of ministry (young children, at-risk youth, outdoor ministry, urban environment, etc.).
- Ask for, and participate in, a yearly job review process.
- Continue a relationship with a spiritual director.
- Seek professional counseling when needful.

Testing

- Have regular conversations with your supervisor to share joys and concerns about your ministry; be honest and be open to feedback.
- Determine if you are serving competently in relation to your working agreement.
- Name personal attributes you want to develop in the coming year.
- Evaluate the balance between your ministry work and personal life.
- Ask if your ministry is accomplishing what you want it to.

- Consider your career or ministry needs and if they are being met in your present position.
 - Seek training in a subject that is new.
 - Take part in a local or national conference for youth ministers to gather new ideas and perspectives.
 - Find ways to serve outside your current ministry to gain new skills or build a new resource network.
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Concluding ministry

At some point in life, everyone concludes his or her ministry in a specific place or program to pursue another vocational interest, respond to a new call, or retire from active ministry. Ending a call for any reason can be difficult and remains an important part of discernment.

Acknowledging

- Determine if you feel called to continue in youth ministry or if you are serving out of a sense of obligation.
- Seek God's guidance in redirecting your ministry.
- Ask yourself if you feel called to end your ministry involvement all together.
- Ask yourself if it is time to move on or retire.

Exploring

Leaving well:

- Write a resignation letter and make a public announcement of your decision.
- Ask for, and participate in, an exit interview.
- Say goodbye.
- Define boundary issues regarding future contact with youth and families.
- Be part of the transition (as appropriate).
- Discern or search for a new call.
- Seek a time away from ministry (if needed).
- Retire and play well.

Leaving under duress:

- Ask for, and participate in, an exit interview.
- Gather perspective and understanding from those you trust.
- Take necessary time for processing your present situation before seeking another call.
- Seek professional counseling or assistance.
- Avoid polarizing or dividing congregation members by seeking allies or supporters.

- Be professional and careful about how (or if) you tell others about the circumstances of your leaving, the congregation, congregational leaders, individual members, etc.
- Seek out means to ensure you are healthy and whole.

Testing

- Journal about your joys and frustrations, considering what you have learned about yourself and what you would change or continue to do.
 - Identify your preferences for your area of ministry and working environment.
 - Take time to dream about future possibilities.
 - Determine any new skills you need to develop.
 - If between positions, take necessary time off for discerning where God is calling you in the future.
 - Continually ask for God's direction in all areas of your life.
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