

CHAPTER ONE:

WHY PARENT MINISTRY?



HISTORY OF LIFE TEEN

Life Teen began in 1985 as a single-parish program in Mesa, Arizona with the mission of “leading teens closer to Christ.” As it grew in popularity with the teens, people around the country began to take notice. The simple model of a Mass focused on teens and their families, followed by a catechetical session called a “Life Night,” remains to this day. As more parishes inquired about the ministry, within a few years, Life Teen began offering national training conferences and providing resources for this new and comprehensive youth ministry model. Over the years, **Life Teen** has grown into one of the most prolific Catholic youth ministry programs in the world being implemented in over 1060 parishes in 26 countries. While Life Teen looks different in every culture, region and parish, the heart remains the same – Sacraments, relational ministry and engaging catechesis. Life Teen wants all teenagers to know that they are loved and an important part of the Church.

As Life Teen continued to grow, the need to minister to middle school youth as well as high school teens became apparent. The reality is if we wait till high school to reach our young people, we are often too late. Out of this need, **The Edge** was created. The Edge is Life Teen’s middle school ministry. Built on the same foundations of Sacraments, relational ministry and engaging catechesis, The Edge seeks to reach, teach and form the middle school youth of a parish. Together with Life Teen, these two ministries can have a dramatic impact on the young people of a parish (and the rest of the parish as well!).

In addition to ministry to high school and middle school youth, Life Teen has recognized that we cannot reach and transform youth while ignoring their families. Parents are the primary catechists of their children and a healthy parish youth ministry program should work together with parents to “lead teens closer to Christ.” In a desire to help parents strengthen their personal relationship with Christ as well as embrace their role in their teen’s faith journey, Life Teen has developed **Parent Life** – a parish-based ministry for the parents of teens. This resource will give

the foundations and structure of this important part of youth ministry.

Most importantly, Life Teen is a movement of the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist, the source and summit of our lives as Catholics, stands at the heart of everything we do. We believe that our entire ministry flows from and back to the altar of sacrifice. As a staff, we unite with our international Life Teen family in prayer during a weekly Holy Hour (every Thursday at 2 pm EST). It is through Christ, with Christ and in Christ that we do all things and give all glory to God.

From its conception, Life Teen has been consecrated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. We continue this consecration annually by prayerfully participating in the St. Louis Marie de Montfort Total Dedication. Our prayer is that Mary will lead us to the feet of her Son with the obedience, humility and trust she exemplified.



PARENTS AS PRIMARY CATECHISTS

Life Teen, following the teachings of the Catholic Church, recognizes the importance of parents in the lives of teens:

“The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute. The right and the duty of parents to educate their children are primordial and inalienable.” CCC 2221

“Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child’s earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God. The parish is the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents.” CCC 2226

Pope John Paul II called the family the “domestic church.” This domestic church is the cornerstone of all civilization and a key piece in what the Pope called the New Evangelization – the need for all Christians to proclaim the Good News of Christ to all people. Pope Benedict XVI, while speaking on the New Evangelization, said, “Evangelizing is not merely a way of speaking but a form of living.” Parents are the spiritual leaders of their families and the primary catechists to their children. They are called to model a vibrant Catholic faith for their teens. The #1 predictor of the involvement of a teen in his or her faith is the involvement of his or her parents. The influence of parents on the faith lives of teens cannot be denied.

But many parents have not fully embraced their role as the primary catechists of their children. This could be because they feel ill equipped in knowledge or experience in the faith. It could be because they see faith formation as the job of the Church. It could be because they themselves do not have a relationship with Christ and do not see the importance of passing down the faith to their children. Whatever the reasons, it is not difficult to see the effects of families not being the “domestic church” they are created to be. Just as the parents can have a positive impact on their children’s faith, parents can also be the “spoilers” in their teen’s spiritual development. Teens who do not see an active Catholic faith modeled in the home often have a difficult time claiming real ownership in their own faith. While these obstacles are not insurmountable, it is a real challenge in youth ministry today.

YOUTH MINISTRY AND PARENTS

The goal of youth ministry is to lead young people closer to Christ. For too long, many youth ministers have worked against parents rather than with them. But parents can be the most valuable resource and advocate for youth ministry in a parish. Youth ministers must work in union with parents to provide an environment where young people’s social, emotional and spiritual growth is nurtured. Parents need to feel they are essential to the youth ministry program in their parish and that the youth minister values their support and is not trying to usurp their role in their teen’s life.

In the Life Teen program, there are several ways that youth ministers can include parents in their child’s faith journey. Here are just a few suggestions:

- Host a parent meeting at the beginning of each semester. Introduce the Core Team to the parents, and share the major dates and events of the upcoming semester. Give a short explanation/teaching on this semester’s theme.
- Send a weekly email to all the parents of teens active in the Life Teen program. Give a short explanation of what was covered at the last Life Night as well as possible discussion questions for the family.
- Invite parents to write letters of affirmation to their teens. These letters can be handed out at a retreat or Life Night.
- Create an intercessory team and invite the parents to be part of this team. The intercessory team is responsible for praying for the teens, Core Team and youth minister.



PARENT LIFE

As a movement of the Holy Spirit, Life Teen could not help but recognize the need to not only minister to teens, but their families as well. It was out of this need that Parent Life was created in 1993. It started much like Life Teen did, at one parish with one group of parents. But soon, the need for a vibrant parent ministry around the country (and world) was apparent. While Parent Life looks different in every parish, there are some basic fundamentals that remain the same.

Parent Life is a ministry dedicated and geared to the parents of teens (and middle school youth). It is designed to give parents an opportunity to support their parish youth ministry program while strengthening their own relationship with Christ and His Church. Parent Life is centered on the Eucharist, dedicated to Mary and obedient to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church. Parent Life simply seeks to lead parents closer to Christ as Life Teen seeks to lead teens closer to Christ. These two ministries (along with The Edge for middle school youth) are closely bound together.

This mission is accomplished by providing community, faith experiences and resources that help lead parents and families closer to Christ. Not only does Parent Life address the realities and issues that affect parents and their teens, but also the relationship the parents have with God. Teens, parents, the Life Teen program and the parish at large benefit greatly from this ministry.

Parent Life seeks to lead parents and their families closer to Christ by:

- Providing parents of teens opportunities to support and assist the local Life Teen and Edge programs
- Offering parents an opportunity to support their teens and youth ministry program through intercessory prayer
- Providing an opportunity for parents to build community with other parents and families through Parent Life Gatherings
- Providing practical resources to help parents grow in their faith and spirituality and assist them in leading their teens closer to Christ
- Providing retreat opportunities for parents and families
- Assisting parents in understanding the cultural dynamics of their teen's world so they can parent more effectively

By offering parents opportunities to serve and to grow spiritually, the ministry allows parents to model a vibrant Catholic faith for their teens. Statistics show that families that pray, attend Mass and serve together are happier, more connected and can have a major impact on the parish community. In the following chapters, you will learn about the structure of the Parent Life ministry as well as how to get this ministry started in your parish.