THE LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE
DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT
Encounter • Formation • Discipleship

Center for FaithJustice
Faith without worX is dead • James 2:26

Nexus

DISCIPLESHIP REIMAGINED

formationreimagined.org

Nexus

Nexus is a pilot experience for parishes who wish to reimagine ministry to, with, and for middle school and high school students. It is a two-year process that includes regular, ongoing, intentional accompaniment. It is not a new program; it is a new paradigm. By walking with parish leaders, we can work together to celebrate what is working, replace what is worn, and implement change at a reasonable pace. In short, Nexus will help parishes connect young people to their own faith, to one another, and to the parish community.

For the last several years, Bishop Caggiano has spoken about the importance of connecting young people with the three transcendentals: truth, beauty, and goodness. By helping parishes create opportunities for discipleship based on these three paths, the life of young people – and the life of the parish – can be transformed.

Why Nexus?

By the time the celebration of sacrament of Confirmation moves to the end of sixth grade in 2023, parishes will need to have a plan to intentionally engage middle school and high school students. Nexus provides the vehicle to accomplish this goal.

With a focus on truth, beauty, and goodness, Nexus provides a comprehensive response to the needs of young people in your parish. Each participating parish, through their Leadership Teams, will be formulating action plans specific to the unique needs of your communities to align with:

- Online, small group, and large group formation opportunities with topics including Theology of the Body, Introduction to Scripture, Models of Prayer, and more.
- Liturgical prayer opportunities that include formation and experiences of evening prayer and, indeed, the entirety of the Liturgy of the Hours, Lectio Divina, adoration, and learning liturgies.
- Service opportunities that include reflection before and after, family opportunities to serve, and small or large group projects that span weeks or months which encourages young people to be agents of significant change in their local communities by focusing on one specific issue.

Requirements for Participation

This new model of ministry to, with, and for young people will initially be opened to ten parishes in the diocese. More parishes will be added in subsequent years.

As with all new initiatives, the first requirement is a willing parish and a willing pastor.

Next, a leadership team is essential. Too often, we leave the coordination of ministry in the hands of one person and expect him/her to do all the work. The establishment of a leadership team is paramount to inaugurating the new vision of Nexus in your parish. More information is available under the Roles and Responsibilities of the leadership team section of this document.

The leadership team should include parents, young people, parish staff, catechists or other mentors, and clergy. Every effort should be made to have the leadership team reflect the cultural, generational, and economic reality of the parish. Teams should be about 8-10 people, depending on the size of the parish. There should also be a primary contact in the parish to ensure access to information on other ministries and opportunities.

This new initiative requires a two-year commitment by the parish.

Consultant

The Leadership Institute, in partnership with the Center for FaithJustice, will hire two full time consultants to oversee the reimagining of ministry to, with, and for young people. Each consultant will work with five parishes.

The consultants will:

- Coordinate all formation for leadership teams
- Meet with parish representatives weekly
- Work with parish leadership teams to create and implement parish action plans focused on truth, beauty, and goodness
- Provide resources for service experiences, including reflections and prayers
- Provide formation opportunities for young people that can be adapted for use in the parishes
- Facilitate all communication and logistics for service opportunities
- Organize the annual retreat and liturgical prayer opportunities, in partnership with the parish leadership teams
- Handle all communication and social media from the leadership team to parents and young people.

While the consultants coordinate the formation, provides resources, and even facilitates communication for the parish, it is the local leadership team that executes the plans. To help parishes get started, a Consultant will accompany them for the first two years. After the initial two years, parishes may continue on their own and choose to continue as a partner parish.

Cost

Each parish is asked to contribute $15,000 per year to cover the cost of the consultant and costs associated with formation, and the annual retreat. If, however, a parish is unable to provide the necessary funds, the diocese will provide assistance to ensure that this ministry is available to all willing parishes.

Youth Engagement

Nexus is a comprehensive model of parish transformation that empowers a Leadership Team composed of select middle and high school youth and adults in their respective parish communities to design and implement parish action plans focused on truth, beauty, and goodness. These action plans will have a special focus on how to engage youth in formation opportunities, liturgical life of the church, and service rooted in faith. As these plans are implemented, youth will have opportunities to engage with the full life of their respective parish communities.

In addition, Nexus will offer additional opportunities for youth engagement:

- The Leadership Teams will offer listening sessions for middle and high school youth in their parishes to hear concerns, needs, and hopes for getting more involved.
- Catholic Service Corps - a weeklong service immersion experience for youth during the summer in Bridgeport
- An all-day retreat experience for middle and high school youth in fall 2022

Timeline

May - June 2021

Recruitment & commitment of parishes by diocesan staff

June - Aug. 2021

Parish staff recruit 10 person leadership team, comprised of youth and adults from the parish community

September 2021

Convene leadership team for the following activities:

- Community "Breaking Bread" Dinner, held within respective parishes, designed to break the ice and begin relationship-building
- Blessing of Leadership Teams in respective parishes at Sunday Mass

November 6, 2021

Orientation & Training Day - gathering of the ten pilot parishes together in-person for orientation to the Nexus process, training on creating a parish action plan, and peer learning opportunities.

November 28, 2021

Nexus Weekend: Leadership teams conducts youth listening sessions and parish-wide survey in respective parishes to begin to cull data, gauge community interest in and understanding of youth engagement, identity areas of common enthusiasm and need across the congregation

Dec. - March 2022

Parish leadership teams begin regular meetings (weekly or bi-monthly, either virtual, in-person, or some combination) to:

- Assess the findings of parish survey
- Establish parish action plan with goals in the areas of truth, beauty, and goodness

March 2022

Nexus Planning & Peer Learning Day for pilot parish stakeholders (Leadership Teams and staff representatives)

April 2022

Leadership teams launch their parish action plans and begin implementation within their parish communities

Summer 2022

Catholic Service Corps: weeklong service immersion experience in Bridgeport for youth

Fall 2022 - Spring 2023

Parish Implementation continued:

- Implementing action plan: engaging all members of the parish in the outlined activities
- Peer Learning Opportunities
- Retreat experience for middle and high school youth

Summer 2023

Catholic Service Corps: weeklong service immersion experience in Bridgeport for youth

Fall 2023

Nexus Closing Gathering

- Open House: leadership teams share action plans, key findings, & outline plans to move forward

Frequently Asked Questions

Why only ten parishes?

By inviting ten parishes or, rather ten leadership teams, into the cohorts of initial pilot parishes, we believe we can effectively accompany those leadership teams over the next two years. By hiring two full-time people and partnering with the Center for FaithJustice, who will manage the consultants, we believe we are structured for success. Each consultant will be responsible for accompanying five leadership teams. They will meet weekly with each parish and will facilitate the planning and communication among young people and their families.

Can I partner with another parish?

If your parish is too small or is financially unable to meet the requirements, you could partner with neighboring parishes and share the cost. In this case, you would only form one leadership team. The young people would still be connected to the local parishes but would meet together as one large group when appropriate. This regional model of ministry has already enjoyed great success in the diocese.

Will you recruit new partner parishes next year?

Yes. Ten parishes will be invited into pilot program this year. Additional parishes will be invited to join next year. For every five parishes, there will be one full-time person to accompany the leadership teams on the journey to get up and running.

Where does Confirmation preparation fall into all of this?

Parishes will continue to prepare young people for the sacrament of Confirmation just as they are doing now. Soon, the plan will be released for parishes to follow as the timeline and age of Confirmation is adjusted. Unless you have previous permission from the Bishop, the age of Confirmation will not change in your parish until 2023.

What if we are already engaged in an approach of ministry with our young people?

If you already have a coordinator of youth ministry or already have a team of volunteers that facilitates the parish's response to the needs of the young people in your parish, good for you. The formation opportunities will still be open to your leaders. In fact, everything Nexus Discipleship offers in terms of formation and resources will be available to your parish. When it comes time for diocesan events, such as retreats or service opportunities, there may be additional expense for your parish since you are not part of the pilot parishes paying into the program.

What can you tell me about the retreat?

Retreat opportunities are a great way for young people to get to know one another, learn more about their faith, pray together, and connect with teens from neighboring parishes. There will be two retreats each year – one for middle school and one for high school. These are open to all young people in our parishes, but free to those young people who are members of the pilot parishes.

How many young people can I have involved?

In short, all of them. Opportunities for discipleship should never be tied to pre-requisites. The genius of Nexus Discipleship is the broad spectrum of activities. Some young people will need regularly scheduled social opportunities to check in with their friends. Others will long to learn more about their faith. Still others will want service opportunities that allow them to live out the Gospel message. Consultants will work with leadership teams to make sure the parish's ministry to, with, and for young people include a wide variety of ways to connect young people with the life of the parish and the universal church.

What exactly does the leadership team have to do?

The leadership team develops the action plan for ministry. The role of the leadership team is not necessarily to do all the work (i.e., chaperoning, making arrangements, etc.), but rather, to recruit others who can assist in implementing events, activities, and opportunities for discipleship.

Wouldn't it just be easier for my parish to hire a coordinator of youth ministry?

Sure. If that is the route you wish to go, we would love to offer our support. Most parishes, however, cannot make the financial commitment to hire a full-time staff person and pay them a just wage, particularly in areas with a denser concentration of parishes. By hiring consultants who work with local leadership teams, parishes get the best of both worlds – local leaders who are well-formed and well-prepared to create opportunity for young people – and a person dedicated to accompanying that team for two years.

What happens after two years?

Parishes have a few options, which will be discussed after the initial 18 months of the pilot experience. Parishes can choose to become a partner parish and continue to share the cost of a consultant. Parishes could opt to hire their own full-time coordinator on their own or by sharing the cost with a neighboring parish. Other options will be discussed as the experience develops.

Center for FaithJustice
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About the Center for FaithJustice

The Center for FaithJustice (CFJ) inspires the next generation of leaders by creating programs to serve those in need and educate for justice in the Catholic tradition. Informed by the passage "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:26), CFJ offers a line of signature "WorX" programs for youth of various ages from middle school through early adulthood. Each WorX program includes an intensive retreat-style immersion experience, through which participants engage in direct service with those in need followed by community, prayer, and reflection activities that emphasize Catholic Social Teaching.

We join the words "Faith" and "Justice" into a single term to reflect our conviction that faith and justice are intimately bound together. Through CFJ's work, we ask people of faith to revisit and renew their commitment to the Gospel and the common good.

After many years of anecdotal data about the "eye-opening," "life-changing", and transformational" impact of the WorX program model, CFJ published "What WorX: Assessing the Impact of Service and Social Justice Programs on Catholic Youth" (Usili 2018) – the first ever study of its kind testing the value of faith-based service immersion programming. It illuminated that "WorX works" in forming lifelong disciples.

In 2018, CFJ was the only Catholic organization in the country to receive a multi-year $1 million grant from Lilly Endowment as part of its "Strengthening Congregational Ministries with Youth" initiative. The grant has enabled CFJ to test and implement an entirely new approach to ministry to, with, and for youth. Our work within the Diocese of Bridgeport, Nexus, is based on the findings of this ongoing research.

Today, CFJ has served more than 6,000 individuals representing 380,000 hours of service and social justice education. The organization is frequently called upon to consult with many partner institutions because of its track record and unique expertise.

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About The Leadership Institute

Through a combination of online learning, face to face workshops, and independent study, the Institute offers creative opportunities for ministry personnel to learn more about the Catholic faith and discover new ways to shape the next generation of disciples in Fairfield County.

In addition, the Institute serves as a clearinghouse for resources for those in ministry and a virtual library for anyone who wishes to learn more about the Catholic faith, regardless of the role one might choose to play in spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ.

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