

Core Members: How to Find and Keep Them

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This time of year, I start meeting with my Core Team to find out their intentions for the upcoming year. It's a time of stress and worry – wondering who will choose to stay, who wants to leave, and who is interested in coming aboard. Core Member recruitment and retention can be one of the most important aspects for a youth minister to consider. When Core Members choose to stay – it's a testament to your program and provides continuity and stability as your teens go from year to year.

Recruitment

1. **Called By Name** Once a year, have the teens write down the names of the people in your parish that they would like to see on the Core Team. Invite them in for a visit – show them their name – in the handwriting of a young person – and tell them that a young person nominated them to be a member of the Core Team. I have gotten more “Yes” responses this way than I have any other way. The candidate sees the value in knowing that the kids already feel like the candidate can “lead them closer to Christ!”
2. **Get up and Speak** Get up at the end of Mass and ask parishioners to pray about joining the Core Team (I thoroughly recommend you ask your pastor permission first . . . otherwise you might be looking at the jobs section of this website). When you do, brag on your teens and the good things they're doing. Talk about your goals for the ministry – then make yourself available in the vestibule or narthex to talk with those interested.
3. **Set the Expectations** Make sure that you have a “Core Description” ready for your team members. Let them know what the preparation process looks like, how much time is really involved, and what you expect the product to look like. You're

going to have a better chance of keeping your Core if they know what's expected and there aren't any surprises once they say yes.

Retention: Keep 'em Around

1. **Train Them Properly** Spend some time with your Core Team – especially your new ones. Make sure they know how integral they are to the team – and make sure they're well catechized. Spend some time praying together, celebrating the Sacraments together, and planning together. Nothing sets a new Core Member at ease more than you walking with them, guiding them, and letting them “steal the show.” The more meaningful you make their training – the more souls you'll retain for heaven.
2. **Praise and Celebration** “As iron sharpens iron, so too does man sharpen man ([Proverbs 27:17](#)).” Your Core members need to hear that they're doing a good job. Praise can be as simple as positive feedback at the end of the night, a thank you card you drop in the mail, or a letter affirming them as a Core Team. Make it a habit to recognize your core in an individual way. Make a list and recognize every core member at least once a year. Share a meal together – and don't be afraid to “fancy it up.” My Core members love my annual Christmas dinner – it's fancy – it's home cooked by me – and its time to sit and enjoy one another's company!
3. **Primary Vocation** Realize that your Core Member is not just your Core Member – but many times they have a spouse, children of their own, a job to tend to, studies for school, and their primary vocation is not being a member of your core team! Relational ministry extends to the Core Member as well. Get to know them! Pray with and for them. Know their needs. Keep them full of the spirit. If your Core Team is on “empty” your teens will feel it too.

Work to create a core recruitment and retention plan. Write it down and see it through. It can be a major influence in your ministry!