

One Question We All Need to STOP Asking

By **Eric Porteous** | JUNE 27, 2012

Throughout my years as a youth minister, I made it a priority to network with other youth ministers. Whether it was at a local gathering, a national training conference, or a summer camp for teens, I always found this time to be extremely valuable. In some instances, we would pray with each other. At other times we might discuss issues we were dealing with at our parishes. There were also moments when we would share a new icebreaker or skit idea. Regardless of the discussion, it always seemed so beneficial, that is, unless one question came up: “How many?”

The “How many” question can be asked in a variety of ways:

“How many teens do you have?” “How big is your group?” “You had a retreat last weekend? How many teens went?”

Given the world we live in, the “How many” question is a tempting one to ask. In our society numbers indicate success. Whether it’s in business, sports, school, or some other area of life, the one who has higher numbers is likely to be viewed as more successful. So, it’s no wonder why so many of us in ministry look at our numbers as an indicator of success. But for all of us asking, “How many,” I have a follow up question, “When did quantity become the new quality?”

Now before I go further, I must humbly admit that I’ve asked the “How many” question. I’ve asked it of other youth ministers. I’ve asked it of myself. And, I’m disappointed to say, I’ve used it to compare my ministry to others.

Quantity became a great source of pride for me, and once I learned this,

I realized that, in ministry, there is an inherent problem judging success based on numbers. Why not focus more on quality?

The problem with quantity is that it points to us, while quality points to God. When quantity says, “Look at all the teens that are coming. I’m such a great youth minister.” Quality says, “Look at the depth of prayer in these teens. God must really be moving.” When we focus on quantity, we lead teens to ourselves. When we focus on quality, we bring them to Jesus.

So allow me to propose another question to measure our success in youth ministry: “How well?”

“How well are we leading teens to the sacraments?” “How well are we evangelizing those who don’t know Christ’s love?” “How well are we developing teens into true disciples?” It’s time to officially retire the “How many” question from youth ministry. Let’s focus on quality, and something tells me that when we do, the quantity will come.