

# **Maronite Youth Organization Eparchial Handbook**



**Office for Maronite  
Youth and Young Adults**  
Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn



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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The following documents were referenced in the development of this handbook:

- Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry (USCCB), August 1997
- Handbook for Catholic Youth Ministry, 4th Edition, Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, June 2018
- Statutes of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, 2019

Our hope is that this Handbook will assist and encourage Pastors and MYO Leaders in carrying out the Church's mission in support of our Eparchy's youth.

## **PURPOSE OF HANDBOOK**

This publication of policies and procedures for Youth Ministry, set forth by the Eparchial Office for Maronite Youth and Young Adults is a comprehensive handbook designed to assist parishes in developing effective and safe youth ministry programming throughout the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn.

All those working in youth ministry within the Eparchy should adhere to all policies and procedures set forth in the Eparchial Statutes as well as all other directives from the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn Office for Maronite Youth and Young Adults.

## **OFFICE MISSION**

The mission of the Office for Maronite Youth and Young Adults is to provide support and resources to assist pastors and youth leaders in journeying with their teens and young adults, bringing them closer to Christ, and helping to form them as intentional disciples. The Office is dedicated to promoting the building of our Maronite Youth (MYO) and Maronite Young Adults (MYA) in the local parish and at the regional and national level. Our focus will be to identify and train leaders in each parish and to equip them for effective ministry providing resource videos, training programs, a handbook and other tools to strengthen the youth, for the present and future generations.

## **GOALS OF YOUTH MINISTRY**

### **Encounter**

- To help our youth and leaders encounter Christ in the Mysteries, through prayer, and in one another.

### **Educate**

- To teach our youth and leaders how to live the Church's teachings and actively participate in parish life.

### **Edify**

- To be examples ourselves, and offer various opportunities to present the youth and leaders models of Gospel living through the lives of the Saints and contemporary examples of faithful witness.

### **Encourage**

- To witness and provide tools to help youth and leaders to share and live the Gospel as disciples of Christ today.

## **CHALLENGES OF YOUTH MINISTRY**

- Our society and culture often neglect the proper well-being of youth. It promotes false images of success and wealth rather than the well-being of youth.
- Leaders and parishes should incorporate contemporary approaches to youth ministry, establishing a foundation for growth.

## **EPARCHIAL STANDARDS FOR MYO LEADERS**

The *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* states that lay persons who devote themselves to special service in the Church (e.g. Youth Advisors/Leaders) are “obliged to acquire the appropriate formation which is required to fulfill their function properly and to carry it out conscientiously, zealously, and diligently.” (Canon 409)

The *National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry*, in collaboration with two other associations dedicated to Lay Church Leadership, set forth norms to define broad areas of ministerial competence that should be used to assess Eparchial Youth Leaders. MYO Leaders should:

- demonstrate the qualities of human maturity needed for fruitful ministry with the people of God.
- demonstrate Christian spirituality as foundational to ministry, integrated in service with the people of God, and possessing a sacramental view of the world that recognizes the world can be a vessel of God's presence and God's transforming grace.
- demonstrate understanding of the breadth of Catholic theological and pastoral studies as well as the intellectual skill to use that knowledge in ministry with God's people from diverse populations and cultures.
- demonstrate a range of leadership and pastoral skills needed for functioning effectively in ministry.

## **FORMATION OF LEADERS**

The Office for Maronite Youth and Young Adults is dedicated to providing the necessary formation to all Parish MYO Leaders to allow them to properly and competently fulfill their ministerial role and provide for the youth of the Eparchy. It is also the Office's role to maintain communication with local parishes to ensure that all necessary trainings and certifications are up to date and completed in a timely manner. Per Eparchial Policy, each MYO Director, Advisor, Chaperone, or Program Assistant must:

- have Pastor approval prior to becoming involved in any youth ministry/programming.
- successfully complete the national criminal background check approved by the Eparchy prior to becoming involved in any youth ministry/programming.
- be properly trained in a child/youth protection program approved by the Eparchy prior to becoming involved in any youth ministry/programming.
- closely review this Eparchial Handbook, the Eparchial Code of Ethics and Integrity, and the Eparchial Internet and Social Media Guidelines, and sign an acknowledgment attesting to this.

Further, all Youth Leaders are encouraged to:

- complete the Youth Ministry Certification provided in collaboration with Franciscan University within one (1) year of becoming involved in parish ministry/youth programming.

- make an effort to participate in all trainings, webinars, or anything of the like put forth by the Eparchy.
- actively engage with a Spiritual Director for their own continued formation and spiritual growth. The Youth Leader should consult with his/her Pastor or reach out to the Office for assistance in finding someone to spiritually accompany them.

## **ADULT LEADERSHIP**

It has been determined that the roles that are allowed in Youth Leadership on the local parish level are limited to: MYO Director, MYO Advisor/Chaperone, MYO Program Assistant.

### **MYO Director**

- Required in each parish; main point-of-contact.
- Age Requirement: 25+ (recommended); 21+ (required).
- Training/Certification: as outlined in section “Formation of Leaders”.

### **MYO Advisor**

- A advisor that offers direct support for Director.
- Age Requirement: 21+ (required).
- Training/Certification: as outlined in section “Formation of Leaders”.

### **MYO Chaperone**

- Recurring/one-time volunteer/chaperone for a specific event.
- Age Requirement: 21+ (required).
- Training/Certification: as outlined in section “Formation of Leaders”.

### **MYO Intern**

- 18-20 year old who has already graduated from high school/equivalent.
- Training/Certification: as outlined in section “Formation of Leaders”.
- It is highly recommended that they be an active MYA member.

## **POLICIES FOR UTILIZING MYO PROGRAM ASSISTANTS (18-20 YEARS OF AGE)**

It is a given that young adults can be a major asset in the development and implementation of a youth ministry program. However, programs for youth and young adults must be separate and distinct. This is in place for safe environment and developmental purposes.

It is the Pastor and MYO Director's responsibility to understand how to effectively utilize MYO Interns. Their role may include:

- facilitating Prayers, Games, Ice Breakers.
- assisting the MYO Director in an ancillary (support) capacity during events and programming.

Young adults ages 18-20 should be considered "Program Assistants" in Youth Ministry and be treated in such a manner. They are to observe and learn in order to be properly formed into future MYO Leaders.

When the Pastor/MYO Director choose to utilize a MYO Program Assistant, the Program Assistant must understand that their role is not one of a MYO Advisor/Chaperone nor are they high school participants.

## **AGE/GRADE REQUIREMENTS OF MYO**

It has been determined for the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn that for a youth to be allowed to participate in their parish's MYO, they must be in high school (Grades 9-12). A grade system, as opposed to age, is to be implemented in parishes and will be the standard on the local and eparchial levels.

At the discretion of the Pastor, a "Junior MYO" may be created on the local level which would accommodate 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. It is crucial that their programming be considered separate from the MYO and a clear distinction is made in their respective membership. It is recommended that the same guidelines set forth in this Handbook, when applicable, are followed.

## **YOUTH LEADERSHIP**

MYO years are also an opportunity to cultivate in youth members skills related to leadership, responsibility, and accountability. It is recognized, however, that this opportunity may not fit the needs of every organization and parish, so some possible youth leadership structures may be:

- to elect a President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary.
- to form event committees among the youth and appoint committee heads.
- to limit all event planning and leadership to only MYO Leaders.

## **CONSENT & WAIVERS**

It is required that the MYO Director maintains a member list of all the youth registered in the parish organization, including any known medical issues and emergency contact information for each youth member.

For any events that will take place away from the parish property, a signed **Parental/Guardian Consent, Liability Waiver and Medical Consent** form for every young person under the age of 18 must be collected.

## **EVENT & MEETING LOCATIONS**

To provide a safe environment for our MYO to grow, MYO events and activities should be held on parish property or a facility conducive for the event (retreat center). Such events include meetings, bible studies, prayer nights, lock-ins, retreats, choir rehearsals, etc. Hosting events at private homes is discouraged. Additionally, MYO Members should not be invited to homes of MYO Director, Advisors, Program Assistants for Parish sponsored events, unless previously approved by the Pastor. MYO events can also include service to off-site soup kitchens, nursing homes, or social events with pastor's approval.

## **RECORDS OF ATTENDANCE**

Accurate records of attendance should be kept in case there is ever a question of the presence of a young person at a particular event. Parents/Guardians may believe their children were at a



particular event when, in truth they were not. Parishes should set up procedures to notify parents of youth non-attendance at an event for which the youth is registered or anticipated to attend.

## **ARRIVAL/DISMISSAL OF YOUTH FROM PROGRAMMING**

MYO Directors must remember that their responsibility to and for youth exists from the time of arrival until the time of departure from parish premises.

Youth should never be left unsupervised while attending any MYO function or activity, whether on the parish premises or at another location.

It is advisable that two responsible adults remain with the MYO Member until all youth have left the function or parish premises, including parking areas. In the event that a parent/guardian is late to pick up their child, the time spent waiting may serve as a great way to further engage the youth present in conversation to build a stronger connection.

If it is necessary for a young person to leave an activity early, the parent/guardian should communicate this to the MYO Director ahead of time.

## **MANDATED REPORTING**

### Physical Abuse & Neglect

**It's the Law:** Any person who has reason to believe that a child's physical or mental health and welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect, is required to report his or her suspicions to local or state enforcement agencies.

**Who Should Report:** Any responsible adult who has reason to believe the abuse or neglect of a minor has occurred.

**When to report:** Immediately- A report must be made after there is reason to believe/suspect that the child has been or may be abused or neglected

**Confidentiality:** Reports of child abuse or neglect are confidential. Information in the reports, including the name of the person who makes the report, may be used only for purposes consistent with the investigation of abuse or neglect.

**Allegations or Suspicions:** Look for any of the following signs of abuse: burns, bruising, fracture, physical neglect, medical neglect, lack of supervision, withdrawal, lack of eye contact.

**Procedures:**

- Obtain as much information as possible from the child or persons involved. Make sure you obtain as many facts as possible prior to making a report.
- An oral report must be made immediately to local law enforcement with a report of allegation.
- After the report has been made, the incident should be reported to the pastor of the child's parish.
- The incident must be kept confidential while law enforcement conducts an investigation.

**Sexual Abuse**

**It's the Law:** Any person who has reason to believe that a child has been sexually abused is required to report his or her suspicions to local or state enforcement agencies.

**Who Should Report:** Any responsible adult who has reason to believe the sexual abuse of a minor has occurred.

**When to report:** Immediately- A report must be made after there is reason to believe that a child has been sexually abused.

**Procedures:**

- Obtain as much information as possible from the child or persons involved. Make sure you obtain as many facts as possible in order to make a detailed and accurate report.
- An oral report must be made immediately to the local or state law enforcement agency.
- The incident should be kept confidential while law enforcement conducts an investigation.
- If the sexual abuse involves any member of the clergy including deacons or sub deacons, or consecrated men or women, the Eparchial Policies on Child and Youth Protection must be adhered to, including a report to the Victim Assistance Coordinator. These policies may be found on the Eparchy of Saint Maron website: [stmaron.org](http://stmaron.org).
- After the incident has been reported to the authorities, the pastor of the child's parish should be informed, unless the complaint is against the pastor.

**Suicide Awareness/Mental Health****Warning Signs:**

- Expressing suicidal thoughts or a preoccupation with death

- Talking about dying or committing suicide in a joking or casual manner
- Expressing thoughts of dying or committing suicide through writing, drawing, or artwork
- Making preparations for dying
- Making out a will or beginning to give away prized possessions
- Personality changes
- Exhibiting abrupt mood swings and changes in behavior
- Expressing hostility, having outbursts of anger, or acting impulsively
- Becoming apathetic and uncaring
- Depression
- Feeling lonely, hopeless
- Changing eating and sleeping habits
- Beginning to use or increasing use of drugs or alcohol
- Losing interest or withdrawing from school activities, friends, and family
- Having made a previous suicide attempt

**Allegations or Suspicions:**

Make sure to obtain facts rather than hearsay.

Be aware. Learn the warning signs.

Consult with your Pastor for guidance, if needed.

**Procedures:**

- Speak to the individual expressing suicidal intentions or thoughts.
- Document as much of the conversation as possible on an incident report.
- Refer! Refer! Refer! Do not take the situation in your own hands. Refer Parents/Guardians to the Pastor or the Office for Maronite Youth and Young Adults for counselling service referrals.

- Contact Parents/Guardians, and meet with them in regard to the conversation, unless it signals abuse in the home.
- Notify your Pastor and give him a written report on the situation.
- Follow up with Parents/Guardians, and youth on the process, and give them additional assistance if necessary.

### Drugs & Alcohol

Anyone participating in *MYO events* will not be permitted to consume alcoholic beverages during those programs. Use of illegal drugs is prohibited at any youth event. Prescription and nonprescription drugs can be used only “as indicated” for the individual. Authorization slips should identify such “indications” for prescribed drugs.

Allegations of drug or alcohol possession or usage should be investigated to determine the accuracy of the allegation. Allegations or incidents should be reported immediately to the Pastor (if present), Parish MYO Director or Advisors and never handled by a single adult.

If the allegations of possession or use of alcohol or drugs is presented, a party or parties should be approached by at least two adults to determine the accuracy of the allegation. If there is reasonable cause, the adults should request permission from the young person to search the young person’s possessions. This should always occur in the presence of at least two adults. It should never be done alone. If the allegations prove false, the incident should be documented and given to the adult’s supervisor. If the allegation proves true, the parent(s) should be called and disciplinary action initiated. Such action may involve professional counseling or rehabilitation as well as consequences for their ongoing active membership within ministry (i.e. dismissal from an event, suspension from trips or conferences for a semester, etc.).

### **Procedures:**

- The Pastor should be contacted first and notified of the situation.
- Local police authorities must be notified in the case of illegal drugs.
- Do not take possession of the drugs. Allow local police authorities to do so.
- All youth found to have consumed alcohol or drugs, have them in their possession, or arrive at an event under the influence, may not be allowed to remain at the youth event and should be picked up immediately.
- Parents/Guardian must be notified, and it should be their responsibility to pick up their son/daughter.

## Smoking

Smoking will not be permitted at youth events. Adults who smoke must use a designated smoking area that is away from the activity and in compliance with local ordinances.

## Weapons: Possession

In the case of weapon possession (firearm, knives, etc.), youth should be told verbally and in writing that their possession of any weapon is absolutely prohibited on the premises of any church event in the Eparchy of Saint Maron or while participating in any parish or Eparchy.

If a weapon is discovered, **the local police should be called**. It is imperative that the safety of all be safeguarded. At no time should the adult try talking the youth into surrendering the weapon. If there is an alleged weapon in the possession of someone attending an event, he or she should be approached in as discreet a manner as possible by two adults to determine if there is a weapon. At that point, the police and parents should be notified of the incident.

## **Procedures:**

- Verify report or accusation, including determining the location of the person with the weapon.
- Call 911, if deemed necessary.
- Initiate steps to reduce any risk, attempting to isolate all youth or adults from the location of the weapon
- If possible, take possession of the weapon from person or location (Do not risk endangering self or other individuals. Only remove a weapon that is not being handled).
- If injuries, assess situation; call 911, requesting ambulance if necessary and if applicable, accompany victim to hospital.
- Notify Pastor and staff.
- Contact parents/guardians (if it is a youth).
- Make a detailed report to the Pastor and any proper authorities.

## **EVENT/RETREAT POLICIES**

### Adult to Youth Ratios

A 10:1 youth/adult ratio is recommended for all MYO events. Parish may opt to have a smaller ratio.

If feasible, parishes should have at least one male and one female chaperone to accompany each parish group when both gender youth attend events. The Office for Maronite Youth and Young Adults will work with those parishes needing assistance in this area.

## **PROGRAMMING**

Adolescents have distinct needs for growth in faith and human development. Effective youth ministry provides developmentally appropriate programs, formation, experiences and events that serve to focus ministerial efforts and to establish realistic outcomes. To set up an environment conducive to the development of faith, it is recommended that MYO Leaders design their meetings in a way that will best serve the needs of adolescents.

Examples of how to be alert to these needs:

- Physiological – food, water, warmth, rest
  - Example: Providing water, snacks and/or food
- Safety – personal security, health
  - Example: A game that involves physical movement
- Love/Belonging – friendship, family, sense of connection
  - Example: Praying together
- Esteem – recognition, strength, self-esteem
  - Example: Making sure everyone is respected and has a voice
- Self-actualization – passions, desire to be the most that one can be
  - Example: Setting up time for self-reflection and/or breakout groups

Example MYO Gathering Outline (Total Time: 1 ½ hours):

- 5 min – Opening Prayer
- 5 min – Introduction of Theme
- 10 min – Ice Breaker (should be relevant to the theme)
- 15 min – Bible Teaching
- 20 min – Breakout Groups
- 5 min – Break / Snacks
- 15 min – Game (should be relevant to the theme)
- 10 min – Wrap-Up / Upcoming Events
- 5 min – Closing Prayer

Tips for Running a Meeting:

- **Point Person** – If your youth group consists of more than 10 adolescents, you will likely have other advisors present during the gathering. While all MYO Leaders may be involved, it is helpful to appoint one adult per meeting to lead the group through the topics.

- **Consistency** – Generally speaking, having a consistent approach to your meetings will help you establish a smooth rhythm and routine with your youth. The structure of your meeting is a great way to create that sense of consistency, as well as the frequency of the meetings.
- **Phones/Technology** – Youth will likely arrive with phones in hand. Rather than ban them, find ways to integrate the technology into programming. For example, ask your youth group to look up a Bible passage and read aloud. It is important to stress that while you are aiming to integrate the use of technology, you trust that the youth will not allow it to become a distraction. If the phone does become a distraction, politely ask them to put the phone away.
- **Mix it up** – While structure of the gatherings and frequency may be set, it is important to change the content of the meetings (i.e. topics, games, discussion questions, etc.) to ensure the youth are engaged. If you find the content is not resonating with the group, ask them for suggestions of future topics.
- **Breakout Groups** – It is helpful to have a list of questions prepared to ask the youth about the theme / Bible passage. This is not a time for the MYO Leaders to preach. Rather, it is a time for the youth to share their reflections. Acknowledge and praise those youth that speak up and be sure to ask probing questions if you would like them to explore a thought further or if you would like another individual to build on someone else’s comment.

## COMMUNICATIONS

We cannot ignore the internet as a tool for communication. However, it is imperative to adhere to Internet and Social Media Guidelines for the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn when communicating to youth via any form of media (ie: internet, social media, texting, etc.). This is not a tool to be used to befriend teens but to be used as a support in communicating effectively in ministry.

### Social Networking

All information displayed on the sites must reflect the Catholic faith and should not call any teaching of the church into question. This includes, and is not limited to, language, photos, songs, videos, bulletins, blogs, podcasts, and applications.

If these services are used to connect youth to the parish/school programming, youth ministry and campus ministry leaders must set up a separate site from their own (if a personal site is set up).

It is highly recommended that no one under 18 is on the personal friends list of an Advisor’s social media page.

The use of smartphone and tablet messaging apps (Snapchat, WhatsApp, Kik, etc.) and “anonymous” apps (YikYak, Whisper, etc.) for one-on-one communication with minors is to be carefully used and only in the context of MYO-related communication. If you receive a text or must text a youth, we encourage including the parent in the communication if deemed appropriate.

### Email, Instant Messaging, Text Messaging, And Video Chatting

Keep conversations brief, to the point and in line with Child & Youth Safety Training Program endorsed by the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn. If deemed appropriate, another Youth Leader or parent should be copied on all exchanges involving the youth.

### Safety Controls For Electronic Communication Channels

When choosing a form of communication with your youth group, be sure to set up the communication channel with appropriate controls to protect your youth from any scams, phishing, inappropriate behavior, etc.

Best practices include, but are not limited to the following:

- When sending out group emails to youth or their parents, make sure email addresses are included in “bcc” section.
- Group chats may be the best way to contact your youth group. However, it can open the door to excessive texts or inappropriate messages being shared. If possible, mute all group members and use the group chat only as a means to share necessary information that is in line with Child & Youth Safety Training Program endorsed by the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn. If the youth have questions, provide an email address(es) where questions can be directed.
- For group chats, be sure to manage access levels for the members of the group. Only MYO Leaders and the Priest should have the access to add or remove the members of a group chat.
- Virtual meetings (i.e. via Zoom) should be private meetings that require a password, a unique link to each approved attendee, and should have a “waiting room” that allows the host to accept a new entrant to the meeting.



## **PARENTS**

During Youth Program events/meetings, all adults/volunteers over the age of 18 must complete Child & Youth Safety Training Program endorsed by the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, background check and sign the three (3) Eparchial policies. It is important to maintain a safe and open space for the youth, so it is not encouraged to have parents involved in any meetings unless they have had both of those requirements met.

## **FORM TEMPLATES**

Please visit the MYYA Office website to find forms/templates including, but not limited to, the following:

- Eparchial MYO Handbook
- Eparchial Statutes
- Eparchial Code of Ethics and Integrity
- Eparchial Internet and Social Media Guidelines
- Eparchial Policy B
- Parental/Guardian Consent & Liability Waiver
- Youth Participant Medical Consent Form
- Youth & Young Adult Counseling Referral Form