



# How to Help Your Child Take Their Next Step

**A GUIDE FOR PARENTS**

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# Dear Parents,



If you're reading this, it's likely because your son or daughter has expressed a desire to pursue vocational ministry. This is a bold, beautiful, and sacred calling, and we at Christ In Youth (CIY) want to celebrate this moment with you.

Hearing that your child wants to dedicate their life to serving the Church is incredibly meaningful. It points to something deep that God is stirring in their heart. It's not just a job or a phase; it's a response to a calling. And while that calling is beautiful, we also know it might come with mixed emotions for you.

You might feel pride...and fear.  
Joy...and hesitation.  
A deep sense of purpose...and a hundred questions.

You're not alone in that. Many parents feel caught between wanting to cheer their child on and quietly wondering: Can they really make a living doing this? Will they be okay? What will ministry ask of them? Am I supposed to know how to guide them through this?

Here's what we want you to hear loud and clear: **You don't have to have all the answers to be the encouragement your child needs.**

**Your presence and support will speak louder than perfect advice ever could.**

The path into ministry isn't always easy or clearly marked. It involves trust, learning, and discernment. But it's also filled with joy, growth, and a front-row seat to God's transforming work. At CIY, we believe that some of the most powerful Kingdom Work ahead will be done by students just like yours—and they won't get there alone. They'll need mentors, a church community, and yes, their parents walking with them every step of the way.

That's why we wanted to give you a place to start.

We designed the Follow Through App to help students take their next step, and to give adults easy tools to walk alongside them. But as helpful as the app is, it can't replace the voice of a parent saying, **"I see you. I believe in what God is doing in you. I'm here."**

So, we want to invite you into this journey, too—not to lead it, but to walk alongside it. Encourage your child when they take a step. Ask them what they're learning. Pray with them. And if you ever feel unsure, reach out to your church leaders. They're in this with you.

This calling your child is sensing? It's sacred. And so is your role in nurturing it.

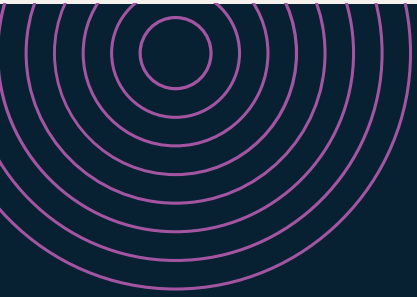
Thank you for trusting God with your child's future.  
Thank you for showing up.  
Thank you for walking with them as they follow through.

- The CIY Team

# Why This Matters

Vocational ministry is more than a career—it's a calling to lead, shepherd, teach, and serve the body of Christ. But here's what many people don't realize:

- Many students express a call into ministry but are never followed up with, or given a path forward, causing them to disengage.
- According to a 2022 Barna study, 1 in 4 pastors plan to retire before 2030.
  - Barna found that, "As a generation of clergy ages and prepares to step down, it is not clear that churches are prepared for the transition. If this trend goes unaddressed, the Church in the U.S. will face a real succession crisis."
- CIY works with thousands of churches every year, and too many of them cannot find qualified workers to step into the open positions on their teams. Online ministry job boards are full and waiting for applicants that aren't coming.



*Then (Jesus) said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Matthew 9:37-38 (NIV)*

To put it simply: the local church is facing a growing leadership gap. Many churches are struggling to fill these positions—not because people don't care, but because too few are responding to their calling from the Holy Spirit. Too few are being equipped to lead. As current pastors retire or step away, we urgently need a new generation of leaders to rise up, be trained, and step into the harvest.

This is why we created Follow Through: **to help students move from a moment of calling into a lifetime of commitment.** We believe that investing in students today means strengthening the Church for tomorrow.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.barna.com/research/pastoral-succession/>

# What is Follow Through?

Follow Through is a series of resources, including a free app created by CIY to help students take their next step after deciding to pursue vocational ministry. **It turns spiritual momentum into tangible growth**, giving students a clear path forward through structured content, practical experience, and supportive relationships.

In the app, students take a series of steps as they pursue their calling. One step at a time, they grow in their understanding and experience of ministry as a career. Each Step includes:

- Resource - A short teaching to help them learn something new
- Rep - A practical action to put that learning into practice
- Relationship - A conversation guide to reflect with a mentor

It's simple, focused, and built to help students take real, meaningful next steps in their calling. As students fill their progress meter, they unlock new stages with more things to learn and experience.



# PURSUE

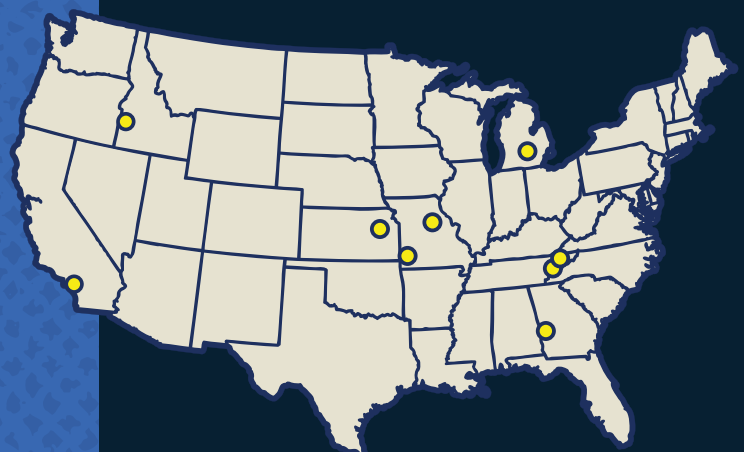
FIND AN EVENT NEAR YOU!

Another resource available from CIY and our partner schools is a retreat-style event created for high school juniors and seniors to pursue their ministry calling. At these events, students will engage with a like-minded community, learn from experienced ministry professionals, and enjoy worship, teaching, small groups and more. Visit [ciy.com/pursue](http://ciy.com/pursue) to see the list of our partner institutions and sign up today!



READY TO ANSWER THE CALL?

Scan or click on the code to get more info and find the right event for you!



# What Does a Career in Ministry Look Like?

While the path to ministry varies greatly from person to person, there are some key guideposts that are helpful to consider. Processing these realities can help you and your child prayerfully and practically prepare for the road ahead.

## Education & Training

- Starting out, most ministry roles require a bachelor's degree. Studying theology, ministry, or biblical studies will give your student the training they need to thrive in a ministry position.
  - Consider a Bible College or Christian University for this kind of specified training.
  - *Note:* Don't assume these schools cost more than average in-state tuition! Compare costs first and seek out scholarship opportunities. Many schools offer scholarships specifically for students pursuing a career in ministry (some even offer full rides!).
- If your student is particularly interested in senior leadership, preaching/teaching, or executive administration, a graduate degree may be required at a later point.
  - A master's degree or doctoral program can be found in Seminary Schools, many Christian Universities, and some Bible Colleges.
  - Some institutions offer other forms of leadership programs or certificates depending on denomination and area of focus.
- Some large churches have programs that offer a path to ministry, even beginning at or before high school graduation. These opportunities may include internships, residencies, certifications, or scholarships to certain schools.
  - Some programs may be in place of a formal degree, or some may partner with an accredited institution to offer an undergraduate degree program in tandem with on-the-job training.
  - **Residency programs** offered by a local church are structured to train and equip emerging leaders for vocational ministry. They are often full-time, typically last 1-2 years, and aim to prepare students for a specific ministry specialty, while gaining on-the-job training.

## Helpful Skills to Develop for Any Area of Focus

- Biblical knowledge and spiritual maturity
- Communication (speaking, writing, and teaching)
- Leadership and team building
- Empathy, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal skills
- Organizational and administrative skills

# What Does a Career in Ministry Look Like?

## Potential Salary

- It's important to take the following factors into account to determine a reasonable salary: church size, applicant's level of experience, church location, primary tasks and responsibilities for the role (i.e.: if you are looking at a youth pastor role, how many grades or students does this position oversee?), and church budget.
- Salaries vary widely by church size and location, but a typical full-time youth pastor in the U.S. could expect to be in a salary range equivalent to a schoolteacher with similar experience in the same area.

## Common Ministry Job Opportunities

We couldn't possibly list all of the job opportunities in vocational ministry, but here are a few roles and areas of focus to consider:

Lead pastor	Family pastor	Production team	Communications
Youth minister	Associate pastor	Graphic designer	Social media
Worship leader	NextGen team leader	Financial officer	Para-church ministry
Children's minister	Groups pastor	HR director	Full-time missions
Mission's director	Church planter	Administrator	Special needs
Teaching pastor	Bible translator	Marketing team	College ministry





# Let's Get Real

## The Challenges

It's important to acknowledge that a career in ministry comes with real challenges.

It can be emotionally and spiritually demanding. Pastors and church leaders often carry the weight of others' burdens, navigate conflict, and work long, irregular hours. Financial strain is a reality in some ministry contexts, and the pressure to meet high expectations can sometimes lead to burnout or isolation without the proper care and support.

It's okay to consider these things honestly—and it's wise to talk about them as a family. Recognizing the hard parts doesn't diminish the call. In fact, it helps prepare your child to pursue the call with resilience, boundaries, and support.

Your honesty and steady presence can help your child face these challenges with open eyes and a grounded heart, sowing a resiliency that is deeply needed in our ministry leaders.



## The Benefits

While there are challenges to consider, there are also profound and lasting rewards.

Some of these rewards are seen on this side of Heaven, and others in eternity. A career in ministry offers the joy of walking closely with people through their most meaningful moments: baptisms, breakthroughs, callings, and celebrations. It provides opportunities to speak life, preach truth, and serve the Kingdom in ways that leave an eternal impact. Ministry leaders get to witness firsthand how God changes lives—and they often find their own lives shaped and refined in the process.

When a student follows this path, they're not just choosing a job—they're stepping into a calling that echoes into forever.

As a parent, you have the privilege of cheering on that eternal work, knowing your child is giving their life to something that matters forever.

# Your Role: Walking With Your Child

Your role is critical in encouraging and supporting this calling.

Even if you aren't called into ministry yourself, you have a unique opportunity to support your child as they discern God's calling on their life. Here's what that might look like as they engage in the Follow Through App:

- **Affirm Their Calling:** Let them know you see their potential and believe in their journey. Plan out times that you can speak encouragement over the gifts and passions God is stirring in them.
- **Encourage Mentorship:** Ask about their mentor. Offer to help them find someone wise and trusted if they haven't yet. Write their mentor a grateful note or meet with them to build a bond. Celebrate the spiritual voices helping shape their path.
- **Stay Curious:** Ask what they're learning and how they're feeling as they go through each step. Download the app yourself, create a mentor account, and follow along through the content to better understand and support your student's journey.
- **Pray With and For Them:** Make prayer a regular rhythm—together and separately. Pray for wisdom, courage, spiritual protection, and joy in their calling.
- **Cheer Them On:** If they add you to their app "Cheering Section," you can see their progress and send encouragements along the way. Celebrate step completions and small wins. Let them know you see their effort.

Ministry isn't a calling your child will walk out alone—and they shouldn't have to. Your presence and participation can offer the kind of strength, safety, and support that makes a lasting difference.





# Conversation Prompts for Parents

It can be hard to start deep conversations, especially about topics like faith and future plans. Spend some time in prayer, coming to terms with your own feelings about what your child has shared, and then plan a special experience, dinner or other time away with them to have an intentional conversation around this topic. Use this time as a way to **mark the moment** as your son or daughter dreams about their future.

**Here are some questions to help get your conversation started.**

1. What made you start thinking about going into ministry? Tell me more about what you've experienced so far.
2. Have any adults affirmed this call in your life? What have they said?
3. Is there a particular kind of ministry or role you're interested in? What is your dream job?
4. What ministry leaders do you look up to? Why?
5. What has been challenging about this journey so far? Tell me more about that.
6. What do you think God is saying to you through all this?

**Here are some questions to add to your regular conversation rhythms.**

1. What has God been teaching you lately?
2. How can I pray for you this week/today?
3. What's one thing you're excited about in your faith right now?
4. What are you learning from the ministry leaders you look up to right now?
5. How did your conversation with your Follow Through mentor go? What are you going to remember about that conversation in particular?

**Remember: the goal isn't a perfect conversation. It's connection.**

## When You Feel Uncertain

You may have questions, concerns, or even fears about your child going into ministry. That's okay. Take time to pray, talk with your church leaders, and explore the realities of ministry together. Take a church leader out to lunch and interview them about their job. Meet up with your student's Follow Through Mentor and hear about how they're growing and being challenged. Talk openly with your own pastor or mentor about how you're feeling.

The best thing you can do is show your child that they are not alone. Your belief in them, your patience with their process, and your presence along the journey can be just as important as anything they learn in the app.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## 1. Is vocational ministry a stable or realistic career?

Yes! Like many jobs, ministry can come with financial and emotional challenges, but it also offers deep personal meaning and long-term spiritual reward. We do know that the job market will have plenty of opportunity for the foreseeable future. Many churches and organizations are actively seeking young leaders who are well-trained and called.

## 2. What if my student changes their mind later?

That's okay. Follow Through is about helping students explore a calling. It's not about pressuring them into a path. If they discern a different calling later, they'll have grown in faith, character, and experience either way.

## 3. Does the Follow Through App cost anything?

Nope! It's completely free for students, parents, mentors, and churches thanks to the vision God gave CIY and many generous ministry partners.

## 4. What's the time commitment for parents?

You're not expected to lead the process—just be present. You can check in occasionally, ask reflective questions, and encourage your student as they take steps.

## 5. Can I use the app too?

Yes! You can either join their "Cheering Section" to see their progress, or create your own account to view the content from a mentor profile.

## 6. Who qualifies as a mentor?

A known, trusted adult who loves Jesus and is willing to walk with a student through their journey. This could be a youth pastor, church leader, coach, or family friend.

## 7. What if we're not sure ministry is the right fit?

That's exactly why Follow Through exists. It's designed to help students try ministry out in safe, supportive ways—and decide with clarity and community.

## 8. How can I help my student stay motivated?

Ask about what they're learning. Celebrate small wins. Pray with them. And remind them that calling is about faithfulness, not speed.

## 9. Are there scholarships or financial help for ministry training?

Many Christian universities/colleges, seminaries, and churches offer scholarships or ministry-specific aid. Talk to your church leaders and search school websites to learn more about those opportunities.

## 10. What if I don't feel qualified to support them?

You're not alone in this. The app provides structure, mentors help guide the journey, and your church leaders are with you for support. Your child doesn't need perfection—they need presence.