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elcome! Thanks for coming along on this journey with us. Youth ministry is one of the more important ministries in our church today. You have the great privilege and responsibility of helping to shape and develop the faith and spiritual lives of the young people in your church. Youth have wonderful gifts and insights to share with the congregation now. However, without you, youth may not find ways to offer their gifts or have their voices heard.

Youth ministry is an exciting and challenging adventure. The purpose of this backpack is to equip you for the journey of working with youth, parents, and other adult leaders. While our congregations may vary in age groupings for youth, this resource is specifically geared toward ministry with youth in middle and high school. In this resource you will find some basic information about *Understanding Youth*. Uncover suggestions for finding support for yourself and other volunteer youth leaders in the section *Support: You're Not Alone*. Additionally, discover practical suggestions in *Helps and How To's*. The final section includes a list of suggested resources, and appendices with sample forms that can be modified for your specific context.

Within this backpack, we use the term “youth minister” synonymously with terms used in our various congregations which may include youth leader, volunteer youth worker, or youth sponsor. You are leading. It is work. All of this is done in the context of ministry. The term “youth minister” acknowledges the special role of ministry that you have with the youth in your church.

Remember, you are not alone on this journey. The mission of the Youth Ministry Commission is “to empower and connect youth and those who minister with youth, serving as their advocate as we journey together in faith.” In addition to this Backpack, the commission provides ideas for youth ministry twice a month which include tips and suggestions for you to use. You may sign-up on line for the “Ideas for Youth Ministry” at www.discipleshomemission.org. Grab your Backpack for an exciting adventure in youth ministry!

Blessings in your ministry as we journey together in faith,

Youth Ministry Commission

Disciples Home Missions



Theology of Youth Ministry

There are many programs for youth in our culture, programs centered in sports, drama, music, education, and service. But youth ministry, while drawing on these activities, is different from any other program with youth because its core is shaped by a distinct mission: to nurture and deepen the relationship of youth to God. Thus, youth ministry is essentially shaped by an understanding of God and how God is known and experienced by young people. Three understandings of God and how God is experienced are foundational for ministry with youth.

One, God is a relational God. One of the basic meanings of the Trinity is that God in Godself is constituted by three manifestations: the Creator, the Redeemer (Jesus), and the Sustainer (Holy Spirit). God is communal. And because God's very nature is relational God is then revealed through relationships. In relationships we come to know God. For youth this experience of God is very important. Youth know what it means to be relational. This dimension of God is powerful for them. In a time of life where friendships are critical to identity, knowing God through our relationships is transformative. And just as God is experienced through youth's relationships with others in their life, so God is experienced through a youth's own relationship with God. As in all deep friendships, youth come to experience a God who knows them intimately and who asks them to be intimate in return. Through a deepening prayer life youth find that they can talk with God about anything and everything. The analogy speaks volumes: we "fall in love with God."

There is both good news and bad news in this understanding that God is relational. The good news is that we can experience God's presence in our lives through loving relationships with others. The bad news is that we may also experience God's absence when there is a void of loving relationships. For youth, experiences of broken relationships and rejection may bring spiritual crises. In such times ministry with youth means becoming the relationship through which God can be experienced.

Two, God is immanent. Immanence refers to God's presence within the creation, both human and non-human. Because God is immanent we know and experience God both in the natural world and in human actions and events. God is revealed to us through these mediums. God's hand can be discerned in the majesty of the towering mountains and the intricacies of the blooming dahlia; God's energy animates each fluttering butterfly and spouting whale. God's breath of life resides in each human. Thus, God is revealed to us in moments and actions where God is given flesh. For Christians the premier occasion in which God was given flesh was Jesus. But incarnating God happens daily as we too give God flesh.



Theology of Youth Ministry (continued)

In ministry to, with, and for youth, God's immanence is experienced through three primary moments or acts: moments of presence, acts of embodied love, and acts of embodied service. Moments of presence occur when God's nearness is experienced in a special way. Whether in a sunset or a special hug, God's presence becomes vivid. In ministry to youth, adults become pivotal mediums of God's presence as they offer a "ministry of presence." Through being present with youth, whether at the game or the concert, at the table or at the youth meeting, adults become a conduit for God's presence, offering the message that God is interested in you.

A second act through which God's immanence is lived out in youth ministry is acts of embodied love. Acts of embodied love take place as youth and youth leaders move beyond love as an emotion and do an act of love for a friend, neighbor, or stranger. Youth are especially sensitive to others in their lives. Given this heightened sensitivity the spiritual challenge is to take that natural awareness of others and build into it God's love for others. Third, God's immanence is experienced when God's love is extended in acts of embodied service. In such acts we give flesh to God's sacrifice as we deny ourselves and serve those in need. Youth experience themselves as God's hands and feet in this world when they take on these special acts of God's immanence. And adult leaders who minister with youth offer pivotal models of God's immanence whenever they themselves engage in acts of embodied love and embodied service in the presence of youth.

Three, God is transcendent. Transcendence refers to God's nature as beyond and outside of us. God's transcendence means that ultimately God is mystery. In ministry with youth we experience God's transcendence in the "mountaintop experiences." In the transforming experiences of the mission trips to the campfire at the close of an amazing day of camp we know a God who is beyond our words and who escapes our meager attempts to put God into our schemes. Youth are especially open to experiences which are "extra-ordinary." God's transcendence meets them in those experiences which cannot be explained but only accepted as full of God.



The Youth Ministry Commission Backpack



Vision for Youth Ministry

A vision statement for youth ministry is essential. It is always better if each congregation develops their own vision statement but we share this one as an example of what a vision statement may look like. A vision statement gives direction to all youth ministry.

Sample:

We are children of God

We are female and male, of all ages and conditions.

We come from many social, economic and racial/ethnic backgrounds.

As God's children, we are called into a loving relationship with our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

We experience God's love as the Holy Spirit leads us in the living of life.

We are Christians

We experience God's love and grace through prayer, worship, service, the study of scripture and history, our participation in the church as the body of Christ, our partnership with people of other faiths, and our ministry of seeking justice for all people.

We are a vital part of the church and its mission. Through youth ministry, we are nurtured as the church responds to our needs and interests and as we give and share ourselves in the church's mission and ministry.

Another Sample Vision for Youth Ministry in the Church:

- Where each young person is called to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and is helped to grow in a dynamic, genuine and meaningful faith;
- Where youth and adults together as partners create a community which celebrates diversity and cherishes each other's gifts;
- Where young people are involved throughout the church's life and are able to take risks in a supportive community without fear of rejection;
- Where youth are challenged and enabled to respond to God's call to wholeness in their lives and in the world, and
- Where young people discover and claim over and over again the Good News of God's redeeming and sustaining love.
- Where young people are educated within their congregations and in institutions both secular and sacred, and are supported in their quest for truth and knowledge in all disciplines;

Adapted from a Vision Statement for Youth Ministry, adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA



Vision Statement for Youth Ministry

A vision statement for youth ministry is essential. A vision statement gives direction to all youth ministry and so will be different for each congregation. You may want to take a look at your church's vision statement as you craft one for youth ministry— the two statements should fit together. If the youth have a part in creating the vision statement, they will feel ownership of the statement. We recommend that you post the vision statement on the wall of the youth room where it can be easily seen!



Understanding Youth

- 1. Adolescent Development*
- 2. Youth Spirituality*
- 3. How to Build Healthy Relationships*

Adolescent Development

and Some Implications for Youth Ministry

- * Middle school youth tend to build strong cliques of friends that are together throughout middle school.
- * High school youth tend to change their network of friends continually throughout high school.
- * Middle school youth are fairly quick to trust. High school youth trust less quickly.
- * A youth's job is to flee the nest, while a parent's job is to make sure they are prepared to leave the nest before they fly away. This is the foundation for many conflicts in families. It is important to encourage conversations so that both parents and youth's feelings are heard and needs met. The more parents and adolescents listen to each other, the more they will understand each other.
- * Middle school youth tend to be embarrassed by their parents, but still want the comfort of having them close by.
- * High school youth may also tend to be embarrassed by their parents but push away from parents more.
- * Youth respond well to story based lessons and telling their own stories.
- * Youth love to debate and to have the opportunity to express their views. Those who don't feel as comfortable expressing their views often will still listen and productively process what they're hearing.
- * For some youth, youth group provides the only place they feel safe and less judged.
- * Metaphors work better with high school aged youth than with middle school aged youth.



Adolescent Development (continued)

- * Youth tend to learn more through active learning. For example, youth will learn more by working in a food kitchen and discussing the experience afterwards as opposed to only talking about hunger issues in a classroom setting.
- * Middle school youth will be more likely than high school aged youth to see God's nature as warm and fuzzy.
- * Youth tend to want to be in control of their own lives. This is part of the reason that this is such a good time for leadership training.
- * High school youth are able and NEED to have a clear understanding of their past faith journey and to be encouraged to consider the possibilities for their future faith journey.
- * High school youth often have great passion about their beliefs, yet, they do not always have a strong foundation or unbiased understanding of those passions.
- * Middle school youth tend to feel most accountable to parents, while high school youth may start feeling more accountable to God.
- * High school youth are dreaming about life's future and they are open to thinking what role faith will have in that future. Middle school youth are more apt to simply assume faith as part of their future.



Youth Spirituality : Not an Oxymoron

"Spirituality" may not be the first word that comes to mind in describing the typical teenager - a walking hormone maybe, but spiritually "hungry" or "deep" or "alive"? On the surface, adolescent spirituality might even appear to be an oxymoron but, those who have both the privilege and challenge of walking and working with young people would consider that unfair at best, misguided, and superficial at worst.

The search for spirituality is one of the deepest issues in present day United States culture- just visit a bookstore or library's New Age bookshelves if you doubt this. Many people are simply empty at the core of their being, and young people are no exception. Although not always verbalized, basic life questions such as these are percolating within the lives of young

MEANING

Is there a center to life, a coordinate around which I can build my world?

Who or what puts it all together?

PURPOSE

How and why is my life important?

What things matter more than others?

What gets me out of bed in the morning?

What keeps me going when life feels overwhelming?

HOPE

Is there a foundation for a hopeful future?

What can re-energize me when I'm ready to give up?

people.

When we pay attention to the spirituality of young people, we recognize their multi-faceted humanness. They, like us, have needs that are intellectual, emotional, physical, social and spiritual.

*The word adolescent is from the Latin verb *adolescere*, which consists of *ad*, meaning "toward", and *alescere*, "grow." The word reminds us that adolescents are in process — growing toward adulthood.



Youth Spirituality (continued)

Consequently, spirituality is one aspect both of the human life-journey, as persons created by God, and that particular stage of the journey that we call adolescence. Like all other facets of our lives, there are spiritual characteristics that are unique and specific to humans during adolescence. Here are some of them:

Middle or Junior High Youth

- Seek a practical, personal religion;
- Want to make their own decisions;
- Have a vision for service;
- Seek "ideals" in life (i.e. adult, self);
- May have doubts and questions about religion that need to be voiced and heard.

Senior High Youth

- Are concerned about finding friends (a support group, a place to belong);
- Seek guidance in moral decisions;
- Are establishing priorities in life and for future plans;
- Want to make a difference;
- Ask "God " questions and want to understand their faith.

The following questions begin the spiritual search of adolescents. They are not always verbalized because young people live in a place beyond words.

What makes life work?

**Is there something big enough for which to live life?
And if so, who or what can put me in touch with it?**

In other words, youth need a combination of both the content of the faith (story, theology - the living voice of the gospel) and an experience of the faith (worship, ritual, life in community, giving self away to the needs of God's world.) Young people begin to mature when they experience the content of their faith; that is, when some of what they have heard, read and been taught begins, little by little, to take shape and happen in their lives.

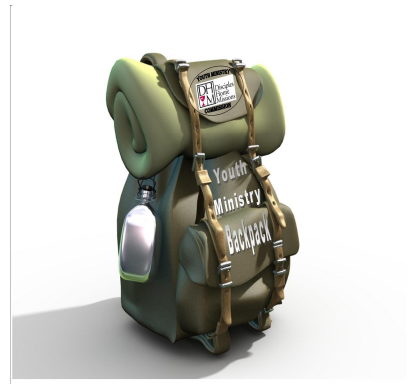
Adolescents need "windows" through which they can see faith (spirituality) in action, and people make the best windows in youth spirituality, where the "rubber hits the road" and in and through relationships - healthy, loving, honest, open and safe relationships. Young people need more than role models; they need adult mentors who will take them seriously - listening to them, loving them and showing them what it looks like to live what one believes. Youth need to see a "full package" - an adult who is real. That means one who is authentic, one who genuinely cares about young people, and one who has a relationship with God which defines his/her life. Young people need a "window" through whom they can see what it means to be authentically and faithfully a child of God.



How to Build Healthy Relationships

Youth need healthy relationships with adults other than their parents. You are uniquely positioned to form healthy relationships with youth and help other adults do the same. Healthy relationships will not develop overnight. Healthy relationships are key to an effective youth ministry. This will take time, energy, and intention on your part. Below is a list of suggestions to begin to build healthy relationships with your youth.

- ▶ Learn their names
- ▶ Learn their family members' names
- ▶ Learn their pets' names
- ▶ Show an interest in youths' lives
- ▶ Attend events (concerts, games, plays) in which youth are involved
- ▶ Attend a school event with youth
- ▶ Accept youth as they are
- ▶ Listen to youth
- ▶ Develop a sense of humor
- ▶ Develop trust by trusting youth
- ▶ Initiate conversation even though it may feel strange
- ▶ Speak naturally and conversationally
- ▶ Do not talk down to youth
- ▶ Pray for your youth
- ▶ Communicate your enthusiasm rather than flaunt your doubt
- ▶ Show youth respect
- ▶ Be sensitive to boundaries of time, physical contact, emotions, and differences in maturity
- ▶ Be yourself



Support: You Are Not Alone

- 1. Connecting Youth Ministry to the Whole Congregation*
- 2. Support for Your Youth Ministry*
- 3. Parents and Youth Ministry*
- 4. Ensuring Safe Boundaries*

Connecting Youth Ministry to the Whole Congregation

In this day of large churches it is easy for one to get lost in the crowd. As true as this is for adults, the reality is even more staggering for the youth in these congregations as well as those from small churches. That is why it is important to keep our youth involved. The question becomes, "How can we get the youth and their families to become integral parts in our congregations?"

It is important for our youth to feel they are wanted; needed in our congregations. How do we make this happen? Youth Sunday is an excellent example. This event allows the congregation to see the youth in action. The youth are able to show the congregation that they understand the importance of the worship service and they are able to execute a service they have created. This opportunity allows those in the congregation to become familiar with the youth and youth programming and its importance in faith formation.

Another way to keep the youth involved is to invite them to church meetings such as adult leadership meetings and congregational meetings and allow them to voice their concerns. The congregation could take this a step further by not only inviting the youth but allowing them to take on a leadership role.

A congregation must take a look at itself and decide how important the youth are to its overall vision for the church. This can be measured by just a few questions:

- ▶ When looking at the church budget, how much of it is set aside for youth activities?
- ▶ When the youth have a church wide program, do the pastor and elders attend?
- ▶ Finally, when big decisions are made concerning the church, are the needs of the youth taken into consideration?

All of these things are important to making the youth and their families feel as though they are an important part of the congregation. The youth are not the church of tomorrow, they are the church of today and we, as youth leaders, are charged with preparing them for this task.



Support for Your Youth Ministry

Support groups - the sure fire way to develop and maintain a healthy and strong youth ministry in a church! When you find the support that is needed, it is easier to teach, push, and empower the youth that you work with and for.

There are numerous ways of support that are very easy to tap into or start. The first place to start is with the Senior Minister of the church. The Senior Minister is the one who is your biggest supporter, who can help identify trends in the church, and is the one that will help you achieve a better ministry.

Once you have the support of the Senior Minister, it is then important to have a pastoral relations committee. A pastoral relations committee is for each minister so that he or she will be able to talk about issues inside the church or on the staff that can not be talked about in other places. A pastoral relations committee is a good resource to extend your ministry's life. If you are a volunteer youth leader, you may wish to have the church appoint a committee for you too.

After all of this, it is time to set up the Youth Ministry Team and a Youth Task Force. The youth ministry team is the place to bounce off ideas, to make sure that you are organized in advance, and the clearing house for information so that volunteers can be found to assist with the weekly programs, fundraisers, and other events. It is essential for this team to have a good cross section of the congregation. First, you need to have two active CYF/high school youth and two active Chi-Rho/middle school youth. They will bring the perspective of youth who are at different places on their journey. Parents would be the next group to ask. How many? It depends on the size of your youth program. Three to four parents, who are not related to the youth on your committee, is a good number. Youth and their own parents do not always see eye to eye and may not be open to sharing when on the same committee. Finally, others you may want to ask: former youth group parents whose youth have graduated and grown up, older adults who love youth and will do anything for youth, and even former teachers are great additions to a ministry team. An asset to the team would be the addition of someone who is extremely organized to make sure all of the details are in place for mission trips, fundraisers, and weekly youth meetings.

Once the Youth Ministry Team is in place, start a Youth Task Force that is made up solely of youth in your group. It works best with six or seven youth from different grades that are active in the youth group. Of course, if your congregation is smaller, you will perhaps have only two or three on the task force. This is where ideas, events, issues, and topics are developed for the weekly youth group meetings. As you know, after awhile ideas need to be renewed and a different way of doing things may be needed. The youth task force is a great way to support youth leaders, along with keeping things fresh in your group. Once you have developed this group, it makes youth planning a lot easier, gives you the time to support other youth leaders, along with getting support for your own "off the wall" ideas that can bring God to the youth in different ways. Support groups are an essential part of ministry no matter the size of the group or church. Take the time to develop yours.



Support for Your Youth Ministry

The work you do as youth minister is meaningful and profoundly significant. It can also be profoundly tiring! You are the cheerleader for your youth and a supportive presence for the other adults who volunteer with youth. You may find yourself constantly in the role of giving care and support. For the health of your ministry and for your own personal well-being, it is important that you find, create, and utilize all the supportive, nurturing systems that you can. Following are some suggestions for where you might find the support *you* need to sustain yourself and your ministry for the long haul.

✓ ***Develop your relationship with your senior minister.***

He or she can be an advocate for your ministry and can offer guidance for your own personal spiritual growth in this journey. You might set an appointment to meet with your senior minister occasionally to check in and receive feedback.

✓ ***Invite the elders to be in prayer for you and your ministry.***

Invite the elders to be in prayer for you and your ministry as well as the youth of the church. Their prayers and care can be significant for you.

✓ ***Contact your regional or area office.***

Contact your regional or area office to inquire about regional/area youth events, training for youth leaders, and contacts with other youth ministers in your area. Seek out opportunities to be in conversation with others who are serving in a similar capacity within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

✓ ***Contact another church in your area.***

Contact another church in your area to see if there is a youth ministers' group that meets regularly to support one another. Find ways to engage in dialogue with other denominations in your community to support each other in your common ministry.

✓ ***Find a youth ministry colleague.***

Find a youth ministry colleague, or colleagues, who can be a partner(s) in your journey. This should be someone that you feel you could talk to in order to share highs and lows of your ministry, bounce ideas off, to reflect and to give and receive support.

✓ ***Make time for your own family and friends.***

Make time for your own family and friends. It is important to nurture relationships that are significant to you. These include family and friends. Keep in touch and build relationships that are mutually supportive.



Parents and Youth Ministry

One way to have a successful youth ministry program is by forming and maintaining healthy relationships with the parents of your youth. Getting to know the parents who are involved in the daily lives of youth is important and maintaining contact can help make a stronger connection between what is happening at home and at church. You should know the names of the parents of the youth in your youth group and keep contact lists current. Making regular phone calls to parents to keep them informed on what is taking place, is important. You can also write a note, send an e-mail, or make a phone call when you see their youth doing something great.

Be sensitive that some of the youth in your congregation may come from nontraditional families. There may be occasions when youth have recently come into a foster or adoptive family context. Furthermore, there are times when a youth may have been taken away from their parents because of abuse or neglect. Having contact from additional caring adults in the congregation is important in creating a system of care and support for your youth and integrating the youth in the life of the entire faith community.

It is unrealistic to expect that all parents are equipped and prepared to lead their children toward Christian maturity. Therefore, identifying parents who have good relationships with youth is important in building and sustaining your youth ministry. There are ways to gradually integrate parents into the youth program. Look for these opportunities and invite parents to play a specific role in the total ministry. You may have defined tasks where parents can offer to help, including transportation, leading games, offering Bible study, hosting a special event at home, helping with a meal, or providing supervision to a special event, just to name a few. Once parents have volunteered, it is important to make sure they feel they are supported by you and others in the congregation. As parents are integrated into the youth ministry, make sure they recognize they are a part of the team, not just as volunteers who have tasks. It is your responsibility to check with parent volunteers on a regular basis to make sure they have the materials needed for special activities, events and lessons.

Supporting and developing relationships with parents who are not directly involved in youth ministry is also crucial. This contact may take place through informative gatherings for all parents and special family events with youth and parents in addition to all-church intergenerational events. Parents need to "buy into" the youth program and be informed about what takes place in the ministry throughout the year. Open communication with all parents is a way you can help parents feel they are a part of this journey and stay connected to the ministry. Other opportunities for parents to be involved in the life of the congregation may also be offered through ministries such as parenting classes, Sunday School classes, and other events and programs.

Much of what is taken into consideration when working with parents is also applicable with other leaders who are not parents. Choose leaders who have healthy relationships with other adults and youth in the congregation. However, recognize that the young college student is not always the best person for leading youth ministry. College students can relate to middle and high school youth because they are younger, but there may be disadvantages that need consideration. Remember, you are not alone, nor are the parents. Contact your regional/area office to see if there are training sessions or other special events for parents and leaders in youth ministry. Get to know your regional/area contact person for youth. Place regional/area youth events on the church calendar, informing the youth and parents of these events ahead of time. There may also be community support groups that meet with those who are involved in youth ministry from which you can draw ideas and support. Disciples Home Missions is a supportive resource that has information available on special events and a variety programs.



Ensuring Safe Boundaries

As we seek to nurture the faith of growing young disciples, it is important to understand our responsibility to protect those who may be vulnerable in our midst. We hear too many stories of abuse and violence in the news and want to take every measure we can to prevent these things from happening to the young people in our community. It is important for us in the church to be proactive in our own settings, creating necessary policies and procedures designed to ensure safe boundaries within the church and to protect our youth and children in the process.

The youth we serve come from a variety of backgrounds. For some, the church may offer the only safe haven they know. There will be some youth who have no clear sense of boundaries, and the church can help them to understand where lines should be drawn. There may be youth who will try to reach out to you or other adults in inappropriate ways. Inappropriate behavior can include excessive hugging or flirting with a youth leader, trying to sit on a youth leader's lap, etc. There are steps you can take as youth minister to help establish and maintain safe boundaries within your congregation's ministry with youth.

A growing number of churches are creating child protection policies in order to be proactive in maintaining a safe environment at church. These policies and procedures are designed first and foremost to protect youth and children with secondary goals to protect adult volunteers and the church. You might contact your regional or area office for sample policies or for local church contacts who are already engaged in this process. You can also find helpful information about Child Abuse Prevention and steps your church might take at www.discipleshomemissions.org/child-protection/. Additionally, your church insurance provider may offer resource information.

Some basic ideas and steps regarding procedures and policy for child protection include:

- Screen your volunteers. You may ask for references, perform a background check, require a minimum participation level for adults who volunteer with youth. Some churches have a "6 month rule" where volunteers need to be a member, or at least an active participant, for six months before they may volunteer with youth or children.
- Train volunteers. Make sure that each volunteer knows what their specific responsibilities are for the volunteer role, what rules are in place for ensuring safety, and whom to contact should questions or situations arise.
- Two-adult rule. Ordinarily an adult should not be alone with children or youth. In counseling situations, try to find ways that an adult may have conversation with youth in a public setting (ex. a corner of a room where there is heavy traffic).
- Overnight events. Risk increases when you move off church grounds; safety measures should likewise increase. In addition to avoiding inappropriate behavior, do all you can to avoid even the appearance of inappropriateness. Do not play favorites. Retreats, lock-ins and even mission trips increase the possibility of inappropriate behavior. Never share a bed with an unrelated youth.
- Reporting plan. Have a plan for reporting procedures if an accusation is made or if a youth shares information regarding abuse from another source.



Helps and How To's

- 1. Models and Approaches to Youth Ministry*
- 2. Ideas for Bible Study With Youth*
- 3. Working With Issue Studies*
- 4. Fun and Fellowship*
- 5. On A Mission*
- 6. Youth Sunday*
- 7. Counseling and Caring*
- 8. Community Youth Ministry*
- 9. Evangelism*
- 10. Sharing Faith Stories*

Models and Approaches to Youth Ministry

As a youth minister, it would be helpful to take some time to think about how you view youth ministry. The approaches (or models) listed below are a place to begin, but you may find that your approach includes aspects of one or more of these models. Remember that youth and youth sponsors are an active community of disciples who are seeking to grow in Christ together.

A disclaimer: By no means does this list exhaust approaches to youth ministry. These are generalized categories, and may often coexist in many programs.

Youth Ministry as Faith Development

In this model the primary purpose is to encourage youth to truly own their faith by struggling through significant issues, studying the scriptures, and relating to a faith community. This faith development will allow youth to live more fully with Christ as personal Lord and Savior.

Benefit: Youth are allowed and encouraged to ask questions, express doubts, and struggle with faith issues.

Differing opinions are not only allowed, they often feed the elevation of the learning curve. Youth can develop a solid understanding of what they believe and why they believe the things they do. This model helps youth clarify their faith so that their faith can be fully lived in the world.

Drawback: Requires flexible, open-minded leadership while still providing guidance and direction for faith formation. Discussion can become chaotic and lose its focal point if not given care.

Youth Ministry as Education

In this model the primary purpose is to provide youth with an environment that teaches them the basics of Christianity. The focus is more on church history, study of the Bible and its use in everyday life, biographical studies, and theology.

Benefit: Youth learn the foundation of Christianity.

Drawback: Requires strong educated leadership, with a solid understanding of Christianity. Be aware that this model might lead to youth accepting your beliefs instead of developing their own.

Tip for Leader

Maintain a balance between scripture studies and the study of social issues in meetings. One way to provide a constructive balance of social issues and scripture study is to alternate lesson styles. This can be done in a number of ways. If your group is able to meet twice a week, you can designate one night, Sunday for example, to be a topical discussion night. The second meeting could come mid-week and be a more structured Bible study. If meeting twice a week isn't an option, you may consider switching every other month between topical lessons and Bible studies. The idea is that in a social issue study; start with a topic and apply scripture references. Then in Bible study start with scripture and apply social issues.

Youth Ministry as an Evangelistic Tool

In this model the primary purpose of youth ministry is to lead youth to accept Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. This model would include planning events that invite non-church youth to experience the Word of God.

Benefit: Keeps the Great Commission at the center

of the youth ministry in reaching out to others.

Drawback: The larger the size of the group or the more inconsistent the membership, the more difficult it is to impact the faith of an individual. One danger is that the focus of the group will be on entertainment and increased membership rather than sharing the faith with others.



Establishing Leadership

A common difficulty for many churches is finding adult leaders/sponsors for youth ministry. Often churches end up asking faithful adults who are willing to give time even if they feel unprepared for the job. Youth ministry is a calling, not just a slot to be filled. Effective adult leadership is important in youth ministry. Expectations and guidelines should be in place and include such things as: church membership, active participation in the life of the congregation, taking advantage of leadership training, understanding counseling with youth, and being a good role model. You may want to consider a formal covenant signed by the sponsor and responsible clergy staff. This covenant should also include a provision for how sponsors may resign or be released. You may want to consider a policy that ensures one leader for every seven youth. Another component of establishing leadership is what role, if any, the youth will take. One way to help youth develop their own leadership skills is to allow them to lead meetings and activities, and be involved in discerning the vision for youth ministry.

Establishing a Calendar

The importance of establishing a calendar of meetings and activities well in advance can not be stressed enough. Planning the school year calendar in August and a summer calendar in April will help both youth and leaders. This also helps avoid the pitfall of last minute meeting planning. Planning such long term calendars assists in meeting the long term goals of

youth ministry. Also, taking a "bird's eye" view of the calendar allows you to be intentional about the balance between fellowship activities, spiritual/focus topics, and retreats. Calendar planning also allows you to track from year to year what has already been studied. The calendar may also be shared with parents to give them a clear view of the youth ministry that is taking place and help them become aware of issues being addressed with their youth.

Curriculum

There are many options for curriculum. Not all curricula are of equal quality nor are they all the best fit for your youth group. You may want to evaluate several different resources and customize them into your own lesson plan, including your own questions. "Canned" youth meetings have a canned youth meeting feel. Youth leaders are the ones who have a personal relationship with the youth and understand their needs, not a publishing house! If the youth respect the leadership and the faith of the leaders, then the curriculum is much more effective. Some of the best curriculum is simply your own faith journey and learned lessons.



Ideas for Bible Study with Youth

There is not one definitive way to engage in Bible study with youth so instead of an end-all be-all approach, find offered here several ideas that you could use to approach the scriptures with your youth group. Remember that one of the best ways to authentically lead others in a study of the scriptures is for the leader to be engaged in Bible study that feeds his or her spirit. Studying the scriptures on your own or with another group prepares you to better lead a group of youth in reading scripture.

The following three ideas for Bible study with youth come from a wonderful book called, Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens (Upper Room Books: Nashville, 2002). Although the book is edited by theologians Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter, contributors to the book are 18 adults and 18 teens who engage in the ancient spiritual practices of the church. These ideas come from the chapter on "The Story," written by Susan Briehl, Mary Emily Briehl Wells, and Magdalena Briehl Wells. (pp 25-30)

1. The Vasteras Method

Developed in Sweden for small groups, this method needs no leader. One person reads the chosen passage aloud. Then everyone reads it again silently, using the following symbols to mark insights, ideas, and questions in the margins. Don't be afraid to make notes in your Bible!
(Upside down exclamation point) Make this candle marking beside phrases that give you a new insight.
(^) Make this mark by phrases that tell you about God or come to you as good news.
(v) Make this mark by phrases that point out a need you have or a challenge you face.
(?) Make a question mark by anything you don't understand.

After an agreed-upon length of time, the participants share their markings, beginning with the candles, followed by the arrows pointing up, then the arrows pointing down. As members of the group share their insights, many of the questions others raised may be addressed and answered. If questions remain, the group may decide to consult a reference book, a pastor or teacher. Don't be afraid to ask questions. No doubt or discovery can "undo" the

power and meaning of this story for you. In fact, sometimes studying the Bible raises more questions than it answers!

2. Ignatian Deep Reflection

Saint Ignatius of Loyola invited the members of his order, the Society of Jesus, to join the biblical story by using their imagination. Try this: Choose a scene from one of the Gospels. Imagine yourself being in it. Become one of the characters mentioned in the story or make up a new character to be. Don't watch the scene like a TV show. Participate in it! This method takes practice. Mom says she tried it for weeks before she could stop analyzing everything and let the more creative part of her brain lead her. Below are the steps with Mom's reflections.

1. Read the story slowly, either silently or aloud (Luke 6:12-19, 27-31)
2. Close your eyes and breathe deeply, slowly, until you are relaxed and calm.
3. Picture the scene. Begin with details in the text. Let your imagination fill in the blanks. (*We are outside...daylight. Jesus prayed on the mountain all night. He and his disciples come to a level place...far from town...an open field...dry, prickly grass...one tree...soft, warm air.*)
4. Let the scene come alive. Who is there? What's happening? What are the sounds? Smells? Actions? (*Excitement...many people...young, old ...many skin colors...noisy, many languages...lots of children...some very sick...Jesus sits beneath the tree. He speaks, "Come. Sit Down."*)
5. Place yourself in the scene. Where are you? Why? What are you doing? Feeling? (*I am in the crowd but alone. I am not sick...curious...I sit on the prickly grass near a child who speaks Spanish. He smiles at me...sweet. I am happy, hopeful, and a little nervous.*)



6. Focus on Jesus. Watch him carefully. What is he doing? Saying? How is he feeling? (*Jesus is calm ...he looks at the crowd...but not directly at me...he blesses us with his eyes. I feel welcomed...children crawl up on his lap...a soft breeze...he speaks, "Blessed are you."*)
7. Choose a sentence to dwell on - something Jesus says or does. See him turn toward you. (*"Love your enemies. Pray for those who abuse you." Jesus comes to the little boy next to me...he is from El Salvador. "Bless her. Pray for her." He means me! I am this child's enemy! My nation has abused his people, harmed his family. I feel sick, sad. "I am so sorry," I say, but I can't speak Spanish. The boy takes my hand. I am crying. Jesus holds me, rocks me.*)
8. Rest in the company of Jesus. Breathe slowly, deeply. Let this be your prayer. If you are with others, you may share your reflections with one another.

3. Explore and Discover

This method is a treasure hunt! The Bible was written two thousand years ago in a setting very different from ours. Some words and ideas don't translate easily into English. Some ancient customs don't translate easily into the 21st century. What did these stories mean to the original audiences? How can we join this old, old story? You'll need tools: a Bible with cross-references (if you are in a group, use several translations among you), biblical maps, a Bible dictionary, a concordance (this book locates any word in the Bible). Explore each clue. Follow every lead. You are seeking God's Word to

you. Jesus is the treasure. Below, Maggie shares her exploration and discovery.

- Explore how the passage fits into the whole chapter, the whole book, even the entire biblical story.

Another Idea — Sacred Reading

There are many forms of this ancient prayer practice called *Lectio Divina*, or Sacred Reading. The purpose is to listen to a passage of scripture, not to study it in a traditional sense, but to listen to for what words or phrases stand out to you. The reading and listening serve as a form of prayer. This is one example of how the practice was used with a youth group:

"In our youth room we light a candle in the center of the room to remind us of God's presence. Then I read the passage out loud one time and the youth get into a comfortable position and listen. After the reading we take a moment or two of silence to let the words sink in. After the silence, I read the same passage again, this time asking them to listen for a word or phrase that stands out to them. After the second reading, we take another short period of silence. Then I ask the group questions like, "What were the words or phrases that stood out to you?" And, "Do you think this passage has anything to say to you or to the group today?"

Luke 6:27-31 is part of the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49). Jesus has just chosen his twelve disciples.

People have come from all over to hear him and to be healed. He seems to be introducing his beliefs and inviting people into his way of life.

He's getting them ready to follow him.

- Search for parallels and cross-references to the passage to discover similarities and differences. For instance, Matthew 5-7 is a longer sermon with many of the same sayings, but it is set on a mountain. Find words or phrases you don't understand in a Bible dictionary.

Locate places on a map. I found the phrase "strike the cheek" from this passage in several places in the Old Testament and wondered what it meant exactly. A Bible dictionary explained the act as a common way to humiliate someone, not beat up the person! And "turn the other cheek" didn't mean "let someone keep hitting you." Turning the other cheek surprised the person who struck, throwing him or her off balance.

Jesus isn't telling you to stay in abusive relationships. He isn't telling you to strike back. He is showing you another way to live. Keep your dignity. Expose acts of violence and disrespect as powerless. All the ways our culture puts people down- name calling, pranks, taunting- can't take

away your worth. That worth is a gift from God. However, you can creatively reveal such actions for what they are: silly and useless.



Working with Issue Studies

When a leader chooses to do issue studies, the environment that is set can be much more important than the chosen topic. If youth do not feel open to speak, instead of an interactive dialogue between youth and leader, the session can become a speech given by the leader. Typically teaching and preaching in this manner does not lead to a change of behavior by youth.

Setting the environment:

The youth meetings prior to the issues topic or topics discussion should be used for community building. There must be trust between the youth and the youth leader. If there is no foundation of trust, the youth will not interact with the topic. You must be very sure that a foundation has been laid, or topical issue meetings will not be effective. Choose a location to meet that is inviting. This means, making sure the meeting location has an element of privacy. If a child feels his/her parent or other adults are listening, he/she may be less willing to speak frankly. You may choose to invite the parents to a follow-up session or to an end of the topic session, depending on the openness and reaction of the youth. Parents, too, must feel welcome and comfortable regarding any meetings between youth and leaders within the church. The location must also be comfortable. Straight chairs at desks do not provide a comfortable environment, therefore the youth will not be relaxed and ready to share. Your seating arrangement should be circular, not in rows. Circular seating will help youth look into each others eyes when communicating, thus building trust.

Choosing a topic:

There are three ways to pick your topic. One way is to ask the youth by questionnaire, verbally or written, during a prior meeting to discuss what is closest to their heart and/or where in their lives they feel they are having trouble following their beliefs about Christianity. Another way is to ask their parents what topic(s) they feel their children need help working through. Depending on how in touch the parents are with their children, this format could be very successful or not at all. The third way is to do some research. Investigate statistics for youth in your community. Subjects that police departments or community health departments typically have statistics for include: teenage drinking, teen pregnancy, school drop out rates, drug use, suicide, sexually transmitted diseases and typical age children have their first sexual encounter, age at which children start smoking, and other issues that may have impact in your community. Police departments and health departments are wonderful at gathering statistics and developing informational pamphlets.



Leading a topical issue study:

Choose an appropriate leader for the topic. This could be the youth leader or an outside community leader or church member who is knowledgeable on the subject at hand. Open the meeting in prayer. Ask a question such as, "Where did you see God this week?" Allow each youth to answer. This gives you insight into where they are mentally and emotionally at this time. This will help you lead the dialogue. Introduce how you chose the topic. Ask if anyone would like to open the discussion regarding the chosen topic. If no youth jumps in to lead, start asking smaller questions that pertain to the subject at hand, gradually leading the youth into the larger subject at hand. Do not rush the topic. Be open and receptive, encouraging interactive dialogue. Allow the subject to run its course. If you are not done at the end of your meeting time allow the youth to work with the subject in their prayer life throughout the week and pick up where you left off at the next meeting. Always close your meeting in prayer.

Example: Teen Smoking

Leader: "Where did you see God this week?" Youth respond independently.

Leader: "Today we are going to discuss smoking. I chose this topic because... Would anyone like to share their personal feelings about smoking? Does everyone agree with _____ on this? Have you ever felt pressure to smoke? How do you feel when your friends or fellow classmates smoke? How do you feel when you see adults smoke? Does the Bible have anything to say on this subject?" Continue on until you feel the subject has run its course.



Fun and Fellowship

In his book, *The Christian at Play*, Robert K. Johnston says, "A person engages in play for its own sake, but it can have multiple benefits: 1) A continuing sense of delight or joy, 2) An affirmation of one's united self, 3) The creation of common bonds with one's world, 4) The emancipation of one's spirit so it moves outward toward the sacred, and 5) The relativization of one's workaday world.

Play is a complex phenomenon that involves thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. In play, we recapture a sense of inner harmony, a feeling of union with the universe and God, and the joy that renews. When we learn to play in a spontaneous, humble, trusting, joyous way we feel our worth as a part of God's creation."

Here are some suggestions for your youth group to try. Some of these will work with any size group; others will be for larger groups. Please adapt to fit your group. Enjoy!

An Ice-breaker Game

Sleeping Bag Drop: (For a larger group or a camp game) *After* your group has introduced themselves, bring an opaque sheet (or an unfolded sleeping bag) to your meeting area. Divide the group into two equal teams and have them gather on opposite sides of the meeting area. The leaders should hold up the sheet so that the two groups cannot see each other. Have each group send one person up to the sheet. On the count of three (or other signal), the leaders drop the sheet and each person tries to say the other's name as soon as they recognize who is on the other side. Whoever says the name *last* must join the other team. Repeat the process with each side sending a different person to the sheet. Continue the game until all the small group members are on the same side.

A Get-to-know-you Game

Train Wreck: Put your group's chairs in a circle, making sure there is one *less* chair than there are people. One person stands in the middle and says: "Never have I ever [insert action here]." Upon hearing the action, every member of the group who *has* done the action must stand up and move to a different chair (that's empty) and cannot move to the chair next to them. The person in the middle tries to get into one of the empty chairs, and whoever is left without a chair stands in the middle and goes next.

Examples of actions: Never have I ever...broken a bone, seen *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, been to another country, gone skiing, eaten celery, lived in Nashville, played Pokèmon, sung along with a Britney Spears song, etc.



A Checking-in Game

Multi-Colored Candy Game: Pass a bag of candy around the group and ask each person to take a handful (and not eat any just yet). Determine in advance a question for each color of the candy. Once the candy has made its way around, ask each youth to count which color of the candies they have the most of (or least). Go around the circle, and have each youth answer the question that corresponds to their color. Possible questions: What's the best thing that's happened since we last met? What are you looking forward to most this week? Where have you seen God today? What have you learned about someone that you didn't know before today? *Note: The questions in this game can be altered to make it a get-to-know-you game.*

An Energy-burning Game

Pass the Hoop: Stand in a circle holding hands and have one pair of youth place their clasped hands in the middle of a large hula hoop. Pass the hoop all the way around the circle without unclasping hands by having each person negotiate their way through the hoop. Assign someone the job of timing the group and try the game several times, attempting to break the previous record with each pass all the way around the circle.

One Frog

This is a game of math (very simple math.) Divide into groups of equal numbers. The object is to get to ten frogs, using the following system: The first person in the circle says, "one frog", the next person says, "two eyes"; the next, "four legs", the next, "in the pond"; the next, "kerplunk;" and the next, "kerplunk."

Then the next person says, "two frogs"; the next person, "four eyes"; the next, "eight legs"; the next, "in the pond; the next, "in the pond"; the next, "kerplunk"; the next, "kerplunk"; the next, "kerplunk"; and the next, "kerplunk." There is one "in the pond" and two kerplunks" for every frog. If you make a mistake, the next person starts over with, "one frog." The group to reach ten frogs wins.

Virginia Reel Conversation

This is a fun way to encourage listening on a one-to-one basis. Have everyone line up Virginia Reel Style - two parallel lines of equal length. Sit on the floor (or in chairs) with lines facing each other, a foot apart.

You have a list of questions or open-ended statements (see below). Ask the first question. The pairs have two or three minutes to talk with each other about that question, each giving the other his or her answer.



Call time. Only one line moves. That line moves to the left one person. The end person comes down and fills the empty space at the other end. Each person has a new conversation partner. The leader reads the next question. Again, each person talks with the person opposite for two or three minutes. Time is called. The line moves to the left again, and so on.

Some questions for discussion:

My favorite thing to do on a Saturday...
The thing I don't like about Sundays
The room I like best in my house is
If I could work for six months anywhere in the world
A place I would like to visit
If I had \$500,000 given to me, I would
I am proud of
What makes me angry ?
I am happiest when
People can hurt my feelings by
I can't stand
A crazy thing I did as a child
Something I did when my parents told me not to
At age 10 or 11 my hero was
If I were in a zoo, I would be
The thing I like best about school
An adult (besides parents) who means a lot to me is

Operant Conditioning

This game is based on the theory of positive reinforcement by B.F. Skinner. The object of the game is to make a volunteer do a task without telling that person a word about what he or she is supposed to do. When the volunteer makes a move in the right direction, he or she receives positive reinforcement from the group in the form of clapping or pounding on a table.

Begin by having the volunteer leave the room. The group decides what task the person should do. For example, the volunteer should walk in the door, over to a Coke bottle, pick it up, and hand it to a designated person. Or, the volunteer should go to a person with a hat on, take it off, and put it on someone else's head. The tasks can be simple or complicated. Everyone in the group needs to know exactly what the volunteer is supposed to do, so they can reinforce him or her correctly.

Call in the volunteer. The volunteer must figure out what he or she is supposed to do. If the volunteer walks in one direction, and there is no clapping he/she knows to try another. No speaking, moaning, or shaking heads. The only sound should be the clapping and pounding. This game is funny, sometimes frustrating, but very exciting when the volunteer finally gets it. It gets very loud at that point.

Crab Soccer

This game is similar to regular soccer. The object is to get the ball between the goal marks. Crab soccer is played indoors with a soccer ball. To get into position, the youth sit on the floor and put their hands on the floor behind them. The players move around on their hands and feet. The ball can be hit with feet, knees, and head, but not hands. Players can collapse on their backs, but they cannot stand up.

From: Youth Ministry by Ginny Ward Holderness



On A Mission — Getting Youth Involved in Mission by "Getting Dirty for Jesus"

Jesus often urged his disciples to go to a place set apart, away from the crowds and the everyday activities when he wanted to make a point or do some real teaching. It was in those places that the disciples grew spiritually and emotionally as individuals and as a close-knit group of believers. So, we too are called to set ourselves apart for revitalization and spiritual encouragement. A worktrip in an entirely new environment provides that opportunity for reflection and growth. There is nothing else that will provide such a powerful growth experience for your youth group.

Why a WORK trip? In responding to God's call to be servants, we can be challenged by a real opportunity to serve. Your group will change the world by building homes, serving food to the hungry, playing with orphans, clearing abandoned lots and more. But more than that, a group pulls together when working on a common goal. The sense of accomplishment and fulfillment at the end of the week is awesome and life changing. It doesn't get any better than that!

Here are a few basic things to keep in mind as you venture into mission work with your group. Disciples Home Missions offers a very user friendly step-by-step manual called "**Get Dirty for Jesus**" that gives very specific how-to's. Please order this book if you are planning a worktrip for the first time...or the 10th time! Some topics covered are:

Choosing a Location: let your group decide where to go, considering what kind of ministry excites them; where have they never been; what would be new ground; where is there a need; and what skills do they have? Look first at Disciples Home Mission Centers in Los Angeles, San Antonio, White Swan, Washington and Appalachia. Also, the Office of Disciples Volunteering sets up worktrips each year in Appalachia and at disaster sites. At these events, you join with others for an incredible experience (and it's all set up for you!).

Determining a budget: be sure to consider transportation, lodging (try to contact a local congregation where you can stay for free), food, cost of materials, insurance (check with your congregation to see if you can get extra), and special recreational events you might include as "perks". Do not let finances be a determining factor in who gets to participate. Raise as much as you can so individuals do not have to pay much. But, don't spend a year raising money. The manual lists some very successful fund raisers that should allow you to only have one or two and fund the whole trip! (Week of Compassion offers grants as well. Applications can be found on line or in the manual.)

Setting a schedule: always remember to BE FLEXIBLE! Work with the needs of your group AND the needs of your hosts to design a week of quality work AND play! The ONLY thing about which to NOT be flexible is having worship every night. Worship each night helps kids to theologize about their work. They share ways they have experienced God in their work and how they have seen Jesus in others. Choose a theme song and write a new verse every night to tell the stories. Give each youth a journal to write in each night at worship. They'll use their words again!



On A Mission (continued)

Structuring the week: have teams who are responsible for cooking and worship each day. Let the youth lead! Let the youth cook! This is the finest form of leader development. Let the youth be fore-person of the day on the worksite. Let them navigate each day. Find ways to involve the youth on all levels of leadership. Other jobs can be: treasurer, photographer, secretary/correspondent, first aid, go-fer. Delegating these duties frees you up to oversee the big picture. DELEGATE! And be very choosy about what adults you take with you! They need to be FLEXIBLE and love kids and FLEXIBLE! Did I mention, FLEXIBLE?

Cooking is a great group builder. Set a basic menu and let the kids figure out and buy the particulars. Set a menu that uses leftovers the next day and if you can buy in bulk, do it! If you are working at a food pantry, ask if you can take home a box like they've assembled and make dinner from that one night! Keep in mind healthy food, food for vegetarians and any other dietary restrictions.

Bible Studies: the experience of a worktrip is deepened if you've done some preparing of your teams ahead of time. Several Bible Studies are offered in the manual that help you to focus on God's call and becoming aware of your role as servant and bridge builder. (Isaiah 58:6-12, Mark 2:1-12, Romans 12:1-13 are some examples).

Do Bible Study Beforehand

On all worktrips, remember the 3 S's: Safety, Sensitivity and Spirit. In all things be SAFE. Take precautions, learn to use tools correctly, etc. Do sensitivity training with your group: how does it feel to be these folks? How do they see us? How can we act as guests in their home and be sensitive to them? And, finally, ALWAYS lift up the One who brought your group together to do this work. And remind the group that they represent the church and Jesus Christ in all they do and say! In addition to the 3 S's...never forget the all important "F" word: FLEXIBILITY!!!!!!

This life changing adventure must not stop when the van drives home. Your service should lead you to want to change the system so that fewer and fewer people will need to be served. Train your servants to be advocates. Continue to make a difference through letter writing, participating in elections, speaking out in your own community. Service is complete when it is combined with advocacy for and with those served.

Finally, remember to do some debriefing with your group. What were the highs and lows, what did they learn? After they have debriefed, have them put together a worship experience to share with the congregation. As others hear the stories, they will want to be a part of it next year and soon, you'll have all ages involved in mission. And once again, the youth will have led the way! Your job: be God's vehicle to provide the best experience possible for the Spirit to work to change lives...those of your youth and adults, as well as those with whom you serve. Go for it!

For more information on ANY of the specifics of putting together a worktrip, order a GET DIRTY FOR JESUS MANUAL today! btyler@dhm.disciples.org



Youth Sunday

Planning and Preparation A Youth Sunday Timeline

- ✓ Get date for Youth Sunday on the church calendar as soon as possible.
- ✓ Two months before Youth Sunday—meet with leadership group.
- ✓ This may be Seniors, or officers, and a small group of active youth.
- ✓ Let them know that their opinions matter. In this meeting do the following:
Share faith stories
 - a person who shaped your faith
 - a favorite scripture or hymn
 - a time you felt closest to God
- ✓ Look for common experiences from the faith stories.
- ✓ Choose a theme based on those common bonds.
- ✓ Choose a main scripture that goes with the theme.
- ✓ Share the theme with the youth group for approval.
- ✓ Share the theme with the church to start promotion.

Five weeks before Youth Sunday — Study the theme —

- ✓ Read the theme scripture to the youth group.
- ✓ Read the theme scripture again. Ask everyone to listen for a word or few words that jump out. Allow time to share.
- ✓ Read the theme scripture again and ask every one to think about how this scripture touches their life.
 - How does it challenge them?
 - How does it comfort them?
 - How does it strengthen them?
- ✓ Read the theme scripture again and ask how this theme scripture could help the church.
 - How could it challenge the church?
 - How could it comfort them?
 - How could it strengthen them?

Four weeks before Youth Sunday

— Choose Parts and Design the Service —

- ✓ A big decision that must be made is to decide on the order of worship.
 - Will the youth design their own?
 - Will they use the traditional service of the congregation?
 - Will they do something in between these two?
- Another issue is who gets what parts. Seniority is often an easy way (older youth pick first)
- Perhaps each group has a part of the service. Ex: Seniors preach, Middle school does communion, younger youth do offering etc.
- Make sure to include gifts of the youth: dance, drama, art, poetry, storytelling, technology, and audio-visual.

Three weeks before Youth Sunday

— Write and Develop Parts —

- ✓ Once parts have been divided up, start writing.
- ✓ Sponsors can ask questions to help get things started.
- ✓ Use the study of the theme for help. Ask what the theme means to the individual youth who has that writing assignment. Ask what is important about their part in the service.



Youth Sunday (continued)

Make sure NOT to write the parts for the youth. This is very important!!! Too often, adults write the materials for Youth Sunday. The congregation can tell the difference between youth who are well practiced and those who have been scripted by an adult.

- Repeat back to the youth what they tell you. Ask questions to help them clarify their thoughts. Do NOT write parts for youth! (Did that get said already?)

Two Weeks Before Youth Sunday — Practice —

- ✓ Go over parts one at a time from the location where they will speak on Sunday. Be encouraging but honest.

One Week Before Youth Sunday — Practice again! —

- ✓ Use live microphones if you can. Practice the service in the order that it will happen so that everyone will know who they follow in the service.

One Day Before Youth Sunday — Practice Again! —

- ✓ Have seats marked where youth will be seated.
- ✓ Have typed copies of everyone's parts (extra copy, just in case)
- ✓ Walk through the service from beginning to end. Stop to go over cues for movement to and from where they are seated.
- ✓ Walk through the service again with NO cues/helps.
- ✓ Remind youth when to show up the next day and where to meet.

On Youth Sunday — Practice Again! —

- ✓ Have youth arrive early enough to run through once...quickly
- ✓ Provide breakfast or whatever is needed to help parents get youth there.
- ✓ Gather for prayer (maybe invite ministers or elders) before the service begins.

*Go - Lead the
People in Worship!*

After Youth Sunday — Celebrate —

- ✓ Plan something to celebrate the work that was done. Perhaps gather to watch the service on video or ...just go bowling!

Evaluate and Make Notes for Next Year

- ✓ Keep records of the planning process and final draft of the service. Write notes as though someone else might be in charge of next year's Youth Sunday.

Visit www.discipleshomemissions.org/ymc-curriculum/ for more ideas.

Another idea:

Challenge your youth group to set up a weekly youth leadership service!



Counseling and Caring

Often youth will come to their youth minister with concerns and personal issues. They come because they feel comfortable with and trust the youth minister. This is both a blessing and a heavy responsibility. The blessing is that the youth minister is a trusted "listening ear" when perhaps the youth has no other place to be heard. The responsibility is to be wise in the ways one counsels and shows care for the youth. Hopefully the following will assist you in making wise decisions as you counsel and care for youth.

For the safety of both the youth and you as counselor, consideration should be given to the space used during one-on-one conversations. Find a space that is somewhat private but still open to public viewing (i.e.-Do not meet with an individual youth at night in an empty church building). You may choose to document conversations. Make sure to keep the documents confidential. Three key questions you should ask when a youth comes to you include the following:

1. What do I have to offer this youth?
2. What does this youth need?
3. What are my limits as a counselor?

Untrained counselors can often find themselves in over their heads. You can still provide effective counseling for a youth by offering care and a listening ear. The following items may help to avoid some of the common danger areas in counseling and caring for youth.

The Question-Answer Trap

Often we find ourselves not listening but focusing on the questions we are asking. Be careful of how many questions you ask. Ask open-ended questions. Do not be afraid of silence; give enough space for the youth to say what he/she needs to say in their own time.

The Helping-Fixing Mentality

Helping is not the same as fixing the problem. Our primary task is to listen to and help the youth come to his or her conclusions in how to solve the problem. Our job is not to "rescue" the youth. We may be able to brainstorm with the youth various options for working through an issue but we need to leave space for the youth to make the final decision.

A Verse for Every Problem Syndrome

We may be tempted to use Bible verses to provide easy answers to difficult problems. The Bible does speak to our lives but at times, it can be confusing when individual verses are misused or interpreted in different ways.

About Us Syndrome

Although we may be able to personally relate to a youth's problem, this is not the time to work through our own problems. Our past experiences are not necessarily the best solution for a youth's problem. Additionally, we must not counsel out of a need to satisfy our curiosity, a need for power, or a need for relationships. The information we discover during a time of counsel must not be used outside of this particular context.

Second Parent Syndrome

We may start to respond to a youth as a parent would. Often youth will come to us because the youth does not feel comfortable talking with his or her parent(s). It is important to be cautious about imposing parental-type expectations.

The No-Weaknesses Weakness

Every counselor has certain limitations and weaknesses. This is only dangerous when we will not admit them. We may find ourselves feeling wanted and needed. Be aware of both your abilities and weaknesses. Do not hesitate to refer a youth to a trained professional.

When to Refer

Many times, the level of expertise needed to deal with the issues presented to us by a youth are more than we can offer. In other cases, the issue may affect us in a way that is beyond our emotional limits. In these instances, it is necessary to refer the youth to a trained professional. You may secure a list of local referral sources from the pastor so you can utilize them when it is time for you to withdraw from the counseling process. Withdrawal from the counseling process does not mean withdrawal from caring for the youth. Continue to find ways to care for and support the youth as they navigate these issues.

When to Report

Private conversations with youth may remain confidential except when the safety of that individual or another person is at risk. Youth must know that if they are a danger to themselves or others or if a youth shares that he or she is being abused or neglected, you have the legal responsibility to report to the proper authorities.





Community Youth Ministry

Jesus never called His disciples to minister only to those who are already in the fold. He commanded them to "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19), and He regularly healed, spoke to, and ate with those who were not His followers. One form of reaching out into the community is direct evangelism, and another is mission and charity work. But a third way is through the Church becoming active in community leadership and helping to build up the community. Go to meetings of your local community association, and contact governmental community outreach organizations and people who serve the community in various ways. This can help you make relationships with community leaders and find out about issues and potential avenues for ministry in your community, as well as help you to acquire grants, resources, and other support.

Specifically for youth ministry, talk to those who work with youth in your community - school teachers, counselors, social workers, and principals; leaders of after school programs and athletic programs. Learn about the issues they see among the youth with whom they work, and about the successes and struggles they have in working with youth. In our community, these leaders often did not know one another, so we formed an organization that meets monthly to discuss issues facing youth in our area, to talk about our various programs and resource one another, and to plan events to work with youth on the issues we see.

But of course, include the youth inside and outside your congregation in your ministry! Community associations frequently have little to no representation from young people, and the associations often talk about youth largely in terms of the trouble they are causing. The youth's voices need to be heard! Get to know not just the youth leaders, but also the community youth themselves. Speak up on their behalf, and get youth together to form their own youth community association to work on issues from their perspective.

Finally, encourage your youth to take what they have learned in church and apply it to their lives in the world. One of our youth, having been on a church mission trip to New Orleans, has organized a trip for youth from his high school to do the same, and a ton of people are going! For Souper Bowl Sunday, we collected soup not just in church, but also in various schools our youth attend. Encourage your youth to learn about various community issues in which they may have an interest, and help them to take action themselves. Don't just do youth ministry within the box of the church!



Evangelism

Today's youth are faced with many negative and ungodly influences and stimuli, such as sex, drugs, peer pressure and gang experiences. Many fall for diverse temptations while searching for acceptance, identity or a place to fit in. To reach them through Christian evangelism oftentimes requires creative thinking and presentation.

While the purpose of Youth Evangelism is to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with those who don't yet have a personal relationship with Him, teenagers aren't going to readily come to Christ unless someone invites them. If you think that putting a sign on the church lawn is going to inspire teens to come to your church, trust me, the vast majority of them won't come. Just as fishermen place fresh bait on their hooks for the type of fish that they are fishing for, we should, as youth workers and evangelists, fish for teenagers with fresh bait specifically for them.

We are living in a contemporary and technological society that is driven by sight and sound. Everything today must be rushed and done quickly. The vehicle that moves our 21st century teenager may be hip-hop music. By knowing this, we now have bait that we can use to reel in our young people who are distracted by what the world is feeding them in the media every day. We can take T.V. shows, videos, and skits that are shown on MTV and BET, make it our own and use them as tools or "bait" to teach relevant messages that make sense to them. In order for this to happen, one must first engage the youth on their level. Secondly, you must begin a relationship with them so that you can earn the right to be heard. Third, you must find out what their needs are and make an intentional effort to help them or find resources for them. Fourth, tell them about Christ and allow them to see your walk. And remember to walk faithfully with God because they will be watching. Finally, you should provide a safe haven for them.

It has been quoted many times by Dr. Stacy Spencer, pastor of New Direction Christian Church, Memphis, TN that, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Although it is true with adults, it is especially true with young people. You have to "keep it real" or teenagers will pick you out of a crowd. They seem to carry with them a strong spiritual gift of discernment and if they suspect a hint of untruth or inconsistency, they will never trust you and the God you serve!

Youth are not just the leaders of tomorrow but the leaders of today. By knowing this as Christians, it is our daily responsibility to intentionally seek out relationship building opportunities with youth to make them into disciples of Christ. Within the next twenty years, they will be leading this country. If we haven't done the jobs that we were assigned to do then we will reap the results of it in the leadership of our young people. Spend quality time with them. Go to their schools. Help them with their homework. Invite them to your home and let them see how a Godly family carries themselves. If they are to be our future leaders who will eventually hold positions in our society and government then we as a holistic body must make sure that they are equipped spiritually, educationally, and financially.



Sharing Faith Stories

The beginning of evangelism with your youth group

As you think about evangelism- the practice of sharing the Gospel with other people, you may recognize that children and youth are often already better than adults about sharing their faith with friends. Children and youth often invite friends to church and youth group events. They should be commended for their efforts in evangelism!

At its basic level, evangelism has a lot to do with knowing your own story as a Christian. What is your faith story? Why does Christ make a difference in your life? If you know your own faith story, if you have already done some thinking about it, then you can be prepared to share it with others in the course of conversation with friends and acquaintances.

Because many of our mainline, protestant denominations have shied away from an "in your face," type of evangelism, we have lost any sense of learning what evangelism means and how to do it. We don't "do" evangelism to "grow" the church so we can get more money for the budget. Instead, we share the story of Christ, and the difference faith has made in our lives, because we were commissioned to do so by Jesus. Jesus gave the great commission in Matthew 28:19, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and the Holy Spirit."

If we can help our youth develop a sense of their own faith story, then maybe they can see how that story fits into the story of what God is doing in the world. We know God's story, and the story of Christ through reading the Bible and being in relationship with God. The next and equally important step is to know our own story. Then we can begin to see where our story meets up with God's story- and we can begin to share that faith story with others.

Here are a few questions that could help a person begin to know his or her own faith story. These questions are geared toward youth who have grown up in the church (which comprise a lot of our youth groups)- with a few other questions thrown in.

Some questions to help you get to the telling of your faith story:

- * What is your first memory of going to church?
- * What is your first memory of prayer?
- * Did you pray growing up at meal times? At bedtime?
- * When did you get baptized?
- * What do you remember about your baptism?
- * Do or did your grandparents go to church?
- * What about your parents, are they church-goers?
- * If not, who invited you to church?
- * What do you like best about church?

- * Outside of your family or church minister, who has been the biggest influence on your faith and why were they such an influence?

- * What causes you to feel weak in your faith? (Things that make you say, "THIS is why sometimes I don't even think God exists.")

- * What makes you feel strong in your faith? (Things that make you say, "Yes! THAT is why I believe in God)!

- * What difference does being a Christian make in your life?

A few additional thoughts:

- * *Invite an Elder or other member of the church to one of your youth meetings to share his or her faith story.* Youth will gain by hearing a faith story "modeled" for them, and they will also have the benefit of getting to know another person in their church family.

- * *Prayer is also an important element in anything we do in the life of the church, particularly evangelism.* Pray for the youth as they learn to tell their stories. Pray for friends of youth, that they might know Christ in their lives as well. Pray for the families in your community. Pray for all the adults that work with you. You cannot pray too much!

- A great book on evangelism for further reading:
Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism
by Martha Grace Reese



Final Thoughts Appendix

1. Resources

Websites

Books

2. Forms

Sample Youth Health Form

Sample Release and Waiver

Sample Adult Volunteer Form

3. Youth Ministry Commission 2010

Resources—Websites

Within the Denomination:

www.disciples.org- This is the website for the general church- here you can get updated information on what is going on in the denomination.

www.discipleyouth.com- This is the page for youth, sponsored by the denomination.

www.discipleshomemissions.org- Go to this site to register for a monthly, Disciples of Christ, youth ministry idea email newsletter called “constant contact”

www.discipleshomemissions.org/ChristianEducation/ACCE.htm Association of Christian Church Educators

Outside or in conjunction with the denomination:

www.ymsp.org- Youth Ministry and Spirituality Project, “This site comes from our desire to be a source of encouragement and inspiration to those who seek to welcome young people into the way of Jesus.”

www.youthministry.com- Group Publishing’s Website- youth ministry ideas and resources including curriculum

www.youthspecialties.com- Interdenominational Group- hosts conventions of youth workers each year.

www.youthandfamilyinstitute.org- The Youth & Family Institute is a faith-based non-profit organization that seeks to strengthen congregations and families to nurture faith, pass on faith, and live well in Christ.

www.cokesbury.com- A source for youth ministry resources, including curriculum.

Other Denomination’s Youth Pages:

www.gbod.org/youth- United Methodist Church

www.episcopalchurch.org/50071_ENG_HTM.htm- The Episcopal Church

www.ucc.org/youth- United Church of Christ

www.pcusa.org/youthministry- Presbyterian Church USA

www.elca.org/youth.html- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Spiritual Resources:

www.upperroom.org/methodx/thelife/prayermethods/lectio.asp – Lectio Divina- a resource for this, other forms of prayer, and other spiritual practices

Websites for Teachers:

www.bible.crosswalk.com/ - Online Bible

www.utoronto.ca/religion/synopsis - Interactive Gospel Parallels

www.ntgateway.com (excellent start point for online research)

For Youth Workers:

www.youthtoday.org/youthtoday/- A Newspaper for those who work with youth- not church affiliated.

www.cpyu.org- Center for Parent/ Youth Understanding

www.search-institute.org- Search Institute is an independent nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide leadership, knowledge, and resources to promote healthy children, youth, and communities.

Events for Youth Workers:

www.youthspecialties.com/nywc - National Youth Workers Convention

www.youthworkerssummit.org -Youth Workers Summit

www.childrenwelcome.org - Children Welcome

www.discipleshomemissions.org/ChristianEducation/ACCE.htm - ACCE (Association of Christian Church Educators)

www.ptsem.edu/iym/forums - Princeton Forum on Youth Ministry



Resources—Books

Bibles

- *New Revised Standard Version*
- *Spiritual Formation Bible*
- *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*
- *The Access Bible*
- *Today's New International Version*
- *The Message Bible*



Bible Commentaries

The New Interpreter's Bible Interpretation

Books

10 Things I Wish I Had Known When I Started in Youth Ministry by Reuellyn Pletcher

12 Months of Faith: A Devotional Journal for Teens by Bettie B. Youngs

103 Questions Youth Workers Ask by John O. Gooch

Beyond Leaf Raking: Learning to Serve, Serving to Learn by Peter L. Benson and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain

Blessing New Voices: Prayers of Young People and Worship Resources for Youth Ministry

by Maren C. Tirabassi

Creating an Authentic Youth Ministry by Edward M. Fashbaugh II

Family-Based Youth Ministry: Reaching the Been-There, Done-That Generation by Mark DeVries

Mentoring: A Guide for Ministry by Cheryl Lawrie

Post Modern Youth Ministry by Tony Jones

Practicing Discernment With Youth: A Transformative Youth Ministry Approach

(Youth Ministry Alternatives) by David F. White

Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church by Kenda Creasy Dean

Safe Sanctuaries for Youth: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in Youth Ministries by Joy Thornburg Melton

Soul Shaper: Exploring Spiritual and Contemplative Practices in Youth Ministry by Tony Jones

Soul Tending: Life Forming Practices for Older Youth and Young Adults by Kenda Creasy Dean

Tag, You're It! 50 Easy Ways to Connect With Young People by Kathleen Kimball-Baker

The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry by Kenda Creasy Dean

Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens, edited by Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter



Sample Youth Health Form

(please print or type **and** when listing *any* name please use *complete legal name*)

Name of Participant _____ M _____ F _____

Name of Parent (s)/Guardian _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____ Phone # _____

Alternate Phone # _____ DOB _____ Grade _____

1. Are there any physical limitations which would prevent this person from participating in all event activities which may include but are not limited to working outdoor/indoor, walking, dancing, exercising?

Y _____ N _____ If Yes, please describe: _____

2. Does Participant have any allergies, physical restrictions or other special instructions?

3. Please describe any recent illness (last 60 days – Participant or Parent/Guardian shall inform SCC of any changes to this information as it relates to future activities or programs) _____

4. Is Participant on any medication? Y _____ N _____ If Yes, please describe: _____

5. By signing below, Participant (or Parent/Guardian if youth) authorizes leaders to continue medication per instructions.

Signature (Parent/Guardian of youth, or if adult/self)

Date



Sample Youth Health Form (continued)

6. In the event that _____ is injured, ill or requires the attention of medical personnel, I agree to permit him/her to be transported in private or public vehicles. I also give permission, under such circumstances, to the medical personnel selected by _____ leaders to order x-rays, routine tests or treatment of him/her. Also, in the event that I cannot be reached in an emergency, I hereby give permission to the physician selected or other health care personnel, to hospitalize, secure proper treatment for and to order injection(s) and/or anesthesia and/or surgery for this Participant.

Signature (Parent/Guardian of youth, or if adult/self) _____

Date: _____

IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR PERSONAL ITEMS THAT ARE LOST, STOLEN OR BROKEN DURING PARTICIPATION IN EVENTS.

INSURANCE INFORMATION:

Do you carry family medical insurance? Yes ____ No ____ If so, please fill out the following section:

Carrier _____ Policy/Group # _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION – person to notify in case of an emergency

Person #1 _____ Relationship _____

Phone _____ Alternate # _____

Person #2 _____ Relationship _____

Phone _____ Alternate # _____

PARTICIPANT COVENANT: I promise to participate to the best of my ability in Youth Events and to treat other participants and leaders with kindness and respect. I also promise not to smoke, drink alcoholic beverages, use illegal drugs or exhibit any immoral conduct.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____



Sample Release and Waiver

In consideration of my/my child's participation in _____ activities and/or programs, including the use of the facilities, I do hereby agree to hold free from any and all liability _____ and its board members, directors, employees and members and do hereby for myself, my heirs, executors and administrators, waive, release and forever discharge any and all rights and claims for damages which I may have or which may hereinafter accrue to me arising out of or connected with the programs/activities and my use of the facility, including but not limited to those caused by the negligence, in whole or in part, of the _____. I hereby declare myself to be physically sound and have medical approval to use the facility.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Participant's printed name _____

Address _____ Phone # _____

If the Participant is a minor, a Parent or Legal Guardian must sign below, AND as Parent/Guardian for the above minor, I hereby execute this Release and Waiver on Participant's behalf and represent that the minor is physically sound and has the needed approval to participate in the programs/activities and use of the facility, and approve of his/her participation.

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

Parent/ Guardian printed name _____



Sample Adult Volunteer Form

The information both requested and provided in this application will be used for the limited purpose of determining an adult volunteer's eligibility for working with children and youth in programs, activities or events related to and sponsored by _____. This information will be kept confidential and in a secure location. After two years this information may expire and a new application may need to be submitted upon request. The applicant has an ongoing obligation to inform the Child Protection Policy Committee of any changes to the information provided in this application.

You are invited to make a contribution of \$10.00 towards the expense for the program necessary to complete the review process for each individual review. Please make any checks payable to _____.

Date: _____

Name (please use *complete* legal name including middle name):

_____ SSN: _____

DOB: _____ Gender: M _____ F _____ Race: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

How long have you regularly attended? _____ Are you a licensed driver? _____

Have you been an Indiana resident for the past 5 years? _____ If not, where? _____

Have you ever been convicted of a crime? _____ If yes, what crime? _____

If yes, when? (Year and county/state of conviction) _____

If yes, please explain the circumstances:

Is there anything in your past that the event director should be aware of that might be a concern with your working with children and/or youth? (This may be discussed privately.)



Sample Adult Volunteer Form (continued)

Please list three references that are not related to you:

(If possible, list persons who have experienced you working with youth or children)

	Name	Address	Phone	Relationship
1.				
2.				
3.				

I certify that all information provided on this application is true and complete. I authorize _____ to perform a background check as determined to be appropriate by the Church's Child Protection Policy Team. I understand that inaccurate or misleading information provided by me or information obtained from the background check may make me ineligible for working with children or youth.

Signature

Date

* this portion to be filled out by Child Protection Policy Committee*

Date of review: _____

Reviewed by: _____

Date background check/LCH completed _____

Copy attached? Y N

Additional commentary:

Approved: Y N

Date of notice to applicant _____



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