

How to Develop A Youth Ministry
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Introduction

What do you think of when someone mentions the word “ministry”? Ministry is most often related to that which a pastor does week in and week out among the adults of the congregation. We think of preaching, visitation to the sick and home bound, and a visit from time to time to a lost person.

Ministry tends to be wrapped up in the many important weekly meetings that call for adults to be present at the church. There are financial issues to be discussed, property issues to be addressed, and general planning sessions that hopefully help things move in a positive direction or at least keep things going the way they have been going for years. This is especially true of smaller churches unable or unprepared to seek out additional paid staff. To these congregations ministry pretty much revolves around the pastor.

Detailed and growing youth ministry is largely lacking in many congregations, because there is no full-time worker able to concentrate on the needs and concerns of teenagers. Volunteers do their best to provide some activities to young people and see that there is a place for them at church, but few churches are prepared to launch into a full-fledged youth program that reaches out to community teenagers with everlasting results.

So what happens to teenagers if there is no formal or professional youth minister on staff? Is it possible to have a real ministry to teenagers if the church doesn't have a youth minister? There is a great need all around us for focused ministry directed towards young people, and even without a paid youth worker, a church can have a thriving and growing youth ministry, if they so choose.

Just like there are ministries designed to meet the needs of adults there should be those designed with the teenager in mind. The purpose of youth ministry is to minister to the particular and even peculiar needs of teenagers within and without the local church. The problems and challenges that face teens are distinct from those faced by adults. We must learn to identify those needs and consider them from a Christian perspective.

Young people need more than casual adult volunteers responsible for bringing potato chips and dip and chaperoning social activities. They need a shepherd figure who can commit quality time to help them spiritually through their adolescent years. Adolescence, for those of us who may have forgotten, is a difficult time. A teen is no longer a child, but neither is she an adult. During these growing years many physical, emotional, psychological, and even spiritual changes take place that require special and concentrated attention. This is why we look for just the right person or people to truly minister to them.

If we ignore the youth in our churches today we will seriously limit the impact our church will have on the world tomorrow. It is crucial that we recognize this “people group” and carefully develop ministries to meet them where they are and guide them to where they need to be.

There are several options we may consider, but the one appropriate for your situation will depend upon the resources and goals of your church. Like most other ministries, no one youth strategy is a one-size-fit-all. You must determine which style and approach is right for your congregation. The church that looks to begin an effective youth ministry must first form a servant team that will

prayerfully begin to investigate the needs and possibilities of the new work. It is never easy to begin a new ministry, and without careful planning the whole thing could become a nightmare. Focused deliberate prayer will be a must.

Write out the reasons why your church needs or wants a youth ministry. Identify as many real needs of the congregation and community as possible. Anticipate any costs that will be involved in establishing the new ministry. Take note of the interest and support of the congregation. Speak with other churches that have similar ministries, and make a list of the successes and pitfalls they've experienced. The investigative team should speak extensively with the pastor to get his perspective on the ministry and how it is developing. Place in black and white what you are expecting from the youth ministry and begin working on a budget that reflects your serious commitment to that ministry. The budget will include all aspects related to the development and maintenance of proposed activities, personnel, and needed resources. Be as specific as possible.

When a complete description of the initial investigation is ready, the team should begin to prepare a detailed profile of the person(s) who will act as youth ministry leaders. The purpose of the profile is to find someone who most closely matches the needs of the local ministry.

Youth ministry options

There are four basic types of youth ministry; voluntary, summer employed, year-round part-time, and year-round full-time.

The volunteer youth minister

For lack of adequate funds, many churches will decide to use volunteers to work with the youth in their community.

This type of volunteer is more than a youth counselor or chaperone, because we are looking for those people particularly suited to work on a regular and constant basis with the teenagers. This volunteer will most likely come from within the congregation, but part of the long range plan is to call a paid individual to the position sometime down the road. Volunteers have their and sometimes these can create hindrances that can hurt the ministry.

Usually churches choose to use one or two married couples of the church to carry on the ministry, and often these folks have teenage children themselves. Whatever the case, it is of the utmost importance that these leaders meet on a regular basis to plan and evaluate the ministry. If planning sessions are not carefully calendared, it is likely that little lasting fruit will come of the efforts, and young people will not receive the attention they require.

Advantages of using volunteers:

- Volunteer ministers do not cost much money, and the local youth ministry can be started without as much formal preparation.
- The young people and members of the church already know the individuals who will be working. The transition to a new ministry and its workers is relatively easy.

Disadvantages of using volunteers:

- Sometimes volunteers do not fulfill their stated ministry responsibilities. It is possible to lose

- sight of the original interest and vision.
- When problems do arise, it must be kept in mind that you will be dealing with church members rather than employees.
- In many instances, the volunteers are not well equipped for youth ministry, and the quality of the ministry can suffer.

The summer youth minister

This method or option of ministry is ideal for initiating a youth ministry. Instead of using local church member volunteers, an outsider is selected to serve as youth pastor. This outsider is paid an honorable salary and, if needed, the church agrees to provide housing for the youth worker while he is on the field.

Advantages of a summer youth worker:

- There is no division of the worker's time and interests (no conflicts of interest). The exclusive purpose of the summer youth worker is to work with teenagers to develop a plan that reaches unchurched community youth.
- Cost is minimal. The summer worker will be on the field during the summer months when regular school classes are in recess. Most churches can easily afford to pay a worker and provide housing for two a three months.
- The church has opportunity to get to know a prospective minister in the event that they decide to call him to later full-time ministry.
- A short term ministry provides the summer worker with valuable ministry experience.
- Some of the best available summer ministers are university and seminary students. Many of these folks will have few summer class conflicts and, in fact, are looking for summer employment.

Disadvantages of using a summer youth minister:

- Unless there is careful local planning to incorporate the summer ministry into the overall ministry effort, the successes and benefits of the summer ministry could evaporate as soon as the worker leaves the field.
- If a different summer minister is used each year the ministry could lack.
- If the local pastor doesn't possess good administrative skills or is insecure regarding his own abilities and responsibilities, personality and/or program conflicts could develop. More personnel demand better supervision and guidance.

The permanent part-time worker

This individual works year round with the teenagers and receives regular compensation for his efforts. Occasionally it is possible to find a bi-vocational worker who can dedicate his free time to the local church youth ministry. This paid worker is more than a volunteer with a more formal relationship with the church and the young people.

Advantages of a permanent part-time worker:

- The worker is committed to youth work year round. He doesn't have to return to classes or leave the field after a few months of ministry. The youth ministry is a permanent part of the overall church program and can be developed as such.
- Even though the church offers a year round salary, it is part-time. The minister has other work

outside of the local church and doesn't have to completely depend upon the church for financial support. It is a minimal financial investment as far as the church is concerned.

- As a general rule of thumb it can be said that the paid worker is more committed to the work than a volunteer would be, because the paid worker is accountable to the local church for the financial support he receives.
- The young people will have a long-term familiar face with whom to develop a relationship. The teenagers needn't have to build new trust each year with a different minister. This will promote ministry stability.
- The paid youth minister can plan with the pastor and other leaders for the long haul. Youth ministry becomes as much an important aspect of the local church as any other ministry emphasis.

Disadvantages of having a permanent part-time youth minister:

- If this individual is a member of the local church, conflicts may arise if he doesn't get along well with other staff or church members. Even though a troublesome worker can be fired it could be ill advised as long as the worker is a long-term member of the local church. Without very careful planning and coordination dismissal could precipitate major internal problems.
- Unless the church invests time to develop a comprehensive job description, difficulties and confusion could arise concerning the direction of ministry. Even though the youth worker is a member of the church, great care must be taken to clearly define expected responsibilities.
- Church decisions could offend church members who are relatives of the youth worker.

The full-time youth worker

The preferred youth ministry worker will be a called outsider who can work on a full-time basis. This individual is selected because of his preparation and comes expecting to dedicate his full attention to the local ministry. His call to ministry is not unlike that of the pastor, only he is called to work specifically with teenagers. The church will be responsible for his full financial support.

Advantages of having a full-time youth minister:

- Like any other full-time worker, this individual can give his undivided attention to the ministry to which he was called.
- It is easier to elaborate a stable ministry that will grow and develop. Every new ministry and minister require a certain period of time whereby everyone gets to know one another which will contribute to a successful program.
- The youth minister works to support and complement the work of the senior pastor.
- During the pastor's absence the youth minister can help with preaching, visitation, and overall adult ministries.
- There is a positive influence on church growth as prospective members become aware of the full-time youth ministry offered by the local church.
- A full-time additional staff person might be used to build up other ministries like Christian education, outreach, or music. In this sense the church gets double for its financial investment.

Disadvantages of a full-time youth ministry program:

- A pastor insecure of his abilities or unsure of his call might feel threatened by the presence of another full-time staff person.

- When problems or divisions arise in the church the youth pastor may unexpectedly find himself on the opposite pole from the senior pastor.
- The added cost can strain the church budget and create new pressures.
- If the church hasn't prepared a detailed job description, confusion may follow as to where the youth ministry is headed. Expectations and responsibilities need to be carefully mapped out and understood before the search begins for additional staff.
- Without coordinated and continuous planning the church might find itself involved in two or more distinct and fragmented ministries.

As we said before, a solid job description is indispensable before considering a minister of youth. The description should clearly list the expectations of the church along with the proposed responsibilities of the new minister. Part of the description should detail ministry objectives and the resources available to accomplish the task. The church must also put in black and white how the congregation will support the minister and his family. Included in the description will be information pertinent to whom the youth worker will be accountable. Generally the youth minister is directly accountable to the senior pastor and personnel committee. When decisions must be made touching financial support or interpersonal conflicts, the personnel committee is best suited to the task. The senior pastor is the manager or general administrator, but when tensions or great differences arise, an objective point of view and counsel is suggested to best mediate the situation.

Any job description should also outline what the church expects in regards to an unmarried youth minister's relationship with young women who may be part of the youth group. It is best if the youth minister not become involved with member young women, because this can open a Pandora's box of problems among the teenagers and their families. The church should set aside sufficient funds and time for the youth worker to improve his ministry skills. When he is able, he will participate in workshops and conferences related to his ministry objectives.

Special Needs of Young People

Psycho-social needs:

Children are very short-sighted. Their world revolves around their parents and other family members who have met all of their needs. The world at large is almost invisible to the small child who depends upon those in the home to bring into focus everything around him. The parents make all decisions for the child and from within this environment he learns moral values and life skills.

The teenager is different. She is no longer a child but is not yet a mature adult. In this new world many emotional and physical changes take place and hormones add an uncertainty to the mix. The young person hasn't yet developed his true identity, and as a rule insecurity and timidity will cause him to follow the path of his peers. True individuality is scarce among the teenage community, and as a result we see them share much in common such as music, clothing styles, language, and pastimes. This shared experience helps them develop their adult identities.

The young person needs friends. This is part of the innate need to be loved and accepted. His friends will, for the most part, accept him as he is and offer a form of support. Unfortunately, many teenagers fall in with the wrong crowd. Instead of his peers helping to develop healthy life habits they often influence in ways that lead to dangerous choices that bring damage and hurt. An effective youth ministry can offer a positive peer environment that leads to strong and healthy life

skills and personal identity.

Teenagers need to belong. In school there are sports, classes, and clubs the teen can join and participate in as an equal; she is on common ground with her peers. In the home the need to belong is just as important, and if there is an open and supportive relationship with the parents she finds a sense of love and respect. In the community or street there exists another tug for identity, and those frustrated young people who have not found a support group at home, school, or church may find themselves caught up with gang life. This is another way the young person looks for love, support, and a sense of belonging.

Young people need guidance and discipline. We all recognize the strong pull of teenagers to be independent, but at the same time they desire for someone to help them set limits and determine responsibilities and decisions. One reason for open rebellion is to try imposed limits and “push the envelope.” If the teenager discovers that he can move beyond the established limits without experiencing the consequences of disobedience it is very likely that he will continue to move beyond what is reasonable and eventually arrive at the point where he is completely out of control and on a path of self-destruction. A youth ministry can help introduce or reinforce needed limits and discipline.

Emotional needs:

The church can provide an atmosphere of love to which the young person belongs. The youth minister can serve as an “off campus” parent, but in a different context. For many teens it is easier to talk to an adult who is not part of the family and home environment. The church youth group itself can be a haven where the teenager can express himself without being ashamed, unless his behavior is such that it is disapproved of by his peers. And of course, who can offer a more sincere and unconditional love than the body of Christ?

One of the young person’s greatest needs is that of self-esteem and confidence. Adolescent changes cause many teens to distance themselves from others. Rapid physical growth leads to a loss of coordination. In other instances the young person’s body may take on an asymmetrical appearance, because some parts grow faster or differently than others. This can be embarrassing to the teen, especially for those caught up in a world that defines beauty and acceptance in terms of media models. Other physical and sexual changes can add to a confused sense of well-being and security. These years of transition call for added encouragement and support from others. The young person needs to know that these changes are normal and temporary, and that she is worthy in spite of physical appearance and ability. Society puts too much emphasis on physical appearance. As Christians we should look to build up the young person and emphasize her inner beauty.

The young person needs a refuge where he can find help and counsel when there are problems at home and at school. He is looking for trustworthy people who will not betray his confidence. A Christian youth group can be a kind of refuge along with the homes of the youth leaders and ministers.

Spiritual needs:

Young people need the Gospel. The world forces its negative influence on teens everyday. Almost every message propagated through TV, the Internet, music, movies, and magazines is a lie. Instead of teaching the teenager how to respect himself and cultivate healthy productive relationships, the media

teaches him how to selfishly satisfy his most base and carnal desires. Worldly philosophy says “watch out for yourself and don’t be concerned about anyone else.” It is a completely pagan and destructive philosophy. The church has a unique opportunity to minister to these disillusioned young people. Real life is not at all like the world Hollywood and its producers project. Happiness comes as a result of a spiritual relationship and not by money and material possessions. An effective youth ministry is able to minister to the real needs of young people and at the same time present the Good News of Christ.

Build Relationships

Youth getting to know the youth minister

In order to begin an effective youth ministry there are some things the minister can do to encourage success. Probably the most important is to develop strong interpersonal relationships. Teenagers will not automatically or immediately place their trust in a youth minister. He must earn their respect and admiration. The minister should take the initiative and introduce himself to the young people of the church. In a very open and personal way the youth minister should begin by speaking to the teenagers about their lives, family, interests, etc. Most young people will respond positively to a sincere approach by someone truly interested in them.

As the youth minister develops friendships among the teenagers he should look for opportunities to share ideas and his vision for the youth ministry not only with the young people but with their parents and other adults of the church. Keep in mind that as a new ministry of the church, the more details you are able to share with the congregation the better. This process will be a useful tool as the young people get to know the youth minister.

The minister getting to know the young people

The youth minister can take other steps to get to know the teenagers. He should maintain a database of each young person as a first step before personally visiting in their homes. Remembering names and personal details will make a strong impression on the teenager and his family. And always remember, you will never really get to know a young person unless you spend time in his home. The youth minister’s task is to minister to the entire person, and this will include the family.

To get to know unchurched teens, the minister should think creatively and look for ways to use his talents and spiritual gifts to deepen (develop) relationships. It may be that a particular ability will be the bridge it takes to reach a lost young person. For example, if the youth minister knows how to play the guitar he might offer guitar classes. If he has interest in a particular sport he can use that as a springboard as he plays with the young people and helps them improve their knowledge of the activity. Sometimes it is more helpful to just play and have fun with the young people than “minister” using traditional methods.

Every young person has special needs

At times building strong personal relationships has much to do with the home life of the teen. On other occasions it may involve school work or teachers. There are many temptations in the young person’s life, and he struggles with how to resist or get out of a difficult situation. Other youth will face sexual challenges. The minister must nurture a sensitive spirit in order to recognize and properly identify felt needs. Though he may be able to identify needs, the youth minister must be honest with himself and others and admit when he cannot adequately minister to a particular circumstance. When it is necessary, he should refer the troubled teen and/or his family to other professional help better

equipped to handle the situation.

Sharing together

Young people want a minister who is open, accessible, honest, and trustworthy. They must have the assurance that they can share anything with the minister without fear of being betrayed. The youth minister must be a good listener even when the subject matter is hard to face. Sometimes the undivided attention and patient ear of an adult is more helpful than words of advice. The youth minister should treat all of the teenagers with impartiality; each must be treated the same way with no exceptions. The minister will want to avoid anything that leads to hard feelings or divisions. Above all, the youth minister should remember that his ministry comes from the Lord, and in all circumstances he wants to personify the love of Christ.

Planning the ministry

Ministry planning mustn't be overlooked. Like any other ministry or church program, careful planning is a must if we expect to reach prescribed goals.

Work through the youth council

The youth minister should not attempt to do all of the work by himself. There are several reasons for this. In the first place, the work is too much for one person, and unless others are enlisted to share in the ministry it will not enjoy long term results. A second important reason is that in all ministry we look for fellow laborers who can learn from our example. We want to disciple these brethren, because the minister who learns to involve others learns how to multiply his resources.

Division of labor and delegation of responsibilities produce fruits that will last. The day will come when the youth minister will move on, and if he has developed a team of co-laborers, the youth ministry can continue even though there is no longer an "official" or professional minister of youth. A third reason for involving others in the ministry has to do with problems and tensions that will arise. It is always more taxing to face difficulties alone. If there are fellow workers or a team helping to plan and implement the ministry, it is likely that any conflict will be minimized with fewer consequences.

Retreats and trips

Besides the regular week to week activities of the youth ministry, the youth minister may want to plan special retreats or road trips. Occasionally there are regional or national youth conferences or emphases. Much attention and great care must go into the planning for these activities, because travel always introduces a whole different set of considerations.

Develop detailed plans well ahead of time

Any activity that involves traveling from the church field must be planned well in advance. In fact, retreat and trip plans should be completely wrapped up days before the actual event takes place. This way the group is less likely to overlook important details, and there won't be the mad last minute rush to finalize plans. Accurate information is a must for proper publicity, and the more solid and complete information to provide parents, the better. The youth minister who knows how to put full details into the hands of the parents early on will experience fewer conflicts, and in the end, get a pat on the back for a job well done instead of an earful of complaints.

As we saw earlier, the youth minister should involve others in the entire process. Some youth, along

with their parents, will take charge of meals, others will arrange transportation and lodging, while others will oversee publicity and sign up. Well maintained lists should be drawn up that highlight names, dates, and responsibilities. The youth minister will serve as the administrator or general organizer, but the many volunteers will help carry out the activity.

Long before the event someone must carefully check all pertinent details with the people and places on the itinerary. If there are reservations or tickets, these must be confirmed. If counselors have been enlisted, their participation also needs to be confirmed, and appropriate materials, schedules, assignments, or other related resources must be gotten to them. If food is to be carried on the trip, someone must see that proper arrangements and purchases have been made. If goods are to be purchased after arriving to the destination, then others will need to be ready with shopping lists and funds. All transportation issues should be settled long before the day of departure. Don't overlook registration fees that will have to be established, collected, and documented.

In some cases it will be helpful to use permission slips along with sign-up sheets. This will help motivate the teens and their parents to commit to a given activity. These sheets should include all pertinent activity details such as dates, schedules, costs, materials, directions, etc. Somewhere on the registration sheet place a paragraph that addresses what is expected of the participant and the parents, and ask the parents to sign the sheet confirming their agreement to the venture and granting permission. Registration fees that are collected at this time will be used to prepare for the actual retreat expenses, be they reservations or advance purchase of needed resources and materials.

Have everything ready and in order a couple of days before the actual retreat or trip.

Long before the scheduled event the youth minister will want to review his plans and evaluate the preparation. Make every effort to complete all arrangements and purchases a couple of days before the departure date. All registration and permission forms should have been received along with accompanying fees. The activity schedule should be finalized and printed. If the activity involves a long trip or a complicated schedule, the youth minister may decide to make room, seating, and job assignments long before the group leaves the parking lot. The point of all of this detailed preparation is to avoid serious conflicts once the actual retreat is underway.

Common sense responsibilities

Before leaving this topic, let's take a look at some matters of common sense.

- 1.** The youth minister should always leave detailed copies of planned trip activities with the pastor and church office. He will include schedules, addresses, telephone numbers, e-mails, and a list of all participants. In the event of an emergency there will be no difficulty contacting someone in the group.
- 2.** If travel is by several vehicles, then develop a plan of how you will stay together on the highway and what to do in the event of an emergency or separation. If there is a problem on the road, and all vehicles are together, the group can lend a helping hand.
- 3.** Be alert for boy/girl relationships. Individuals should never wander off from the youth group, and all teenagers should be present for all activities. A few brief unguarded moments can ruin the event for everyone.

4. Rules are necessary and practical. Insist on proper behavior, and make sure all participants respect the rules and schedules that were spelled out in the original registration forms.

5. The youth minister should learn early in his ministry the importance of arriving back to the church thirty minutes ahead of schedule following a retreat or trip. The parents will appreciate this mature and responsible attitude. If there is a delay, then parents must be notified accordingly. Keep in mind that the best retreat in the world can be spoiled by angering parents and others who have grown worried and impatient waiting back at home for a late arriving youth group.

6. NEVER WORRY A PARENT!

Youth Ministry Ideas

Monthly after-church get-togethers

These times of fellowship can be done at church or in homes. Volunteers will prepare refreshments and a brief program will be planned. The young people can sing, play games, or just sit around and relax as they share.

Bible studies

It is very important in any youth ministry to have a balance between recreational and spiritual activity. Bible studies should be designed with the teenager in mind.

Youth Camp

At least once a year the youth should have opportunity to participate in a youth camp or conference along with other youth groups.

Regional youth services

From time to time the local association will coordinate a special youth service. Local churches should do all they can to make sure their young people are able to participate in these events.

Concerts

A concert can be designed as an outreach tool to reach unchurched teenagers or as a gathering especially for Christian young people.

Discipleship

Discipleship is the basic foundation for any long-term ministry.

Drama

This is one of many ministry activities that young people can use to share the Gospel or teach spiritual truths.

Movies/videos

There are many sources of Christian movies and videos that a local youth ministry can put to good use.

Home made ice cream

This activity promotes fellowship and fun among the young people, or it can be used to reach out to new teenagers in the community. It is fun, inexpensive, and easy.

Mission trips

When possible, the youth group should put together a mission trip that involves them as missionaries meeting the needs of others. Whether foreign or domestic is not as important as learning what it means to sacrifice in order to serve others.

Pizza party

This is another inexpensive and fun activity that can be used either evangelistically or simply as a time to deepen youth relationships.

Puppets

Similar to drama, puppets are a wonderful means to communicate the Gospel and spiritual truth.

Recreation days/sports

Young people enjoy recreation. Many of these types of activities can be planned during the year that provide meaningful time for playing and growing together as a youth group. Along with some preparation, unchurched teens can be targeted and invited to join in the fun.

Retreats

At least once a year the youth group should make time to get away from the regular routine for spiritual meditation and to contemplate the purpose of the youth ministry. These retreats can be some of the most important of the year, because the young person purposefully sets aside quality time to examine his life and spiritual pilgrimage in light of God's Word. If the church is financially able, a conference leader or speaker can be invited.

Skating

Almost everyone has worn a pair of skates. It remains a fun activity accessible to all the young people.

Youth conferences

This kind of meeting zeroes in on a single topic or theme particularly designed with the needs of the youth group in mind. It is common to enlist outside leaders to direct the conference.

Vacation Bible School

Besides the traditional youth VBS activities, the young people can be the teachers and leaders in a children's VBS experience.

Swimming

If someone in the church has a pool, this activity can easily be planned. As with other recreational events, unchurched teenagers can be invited to the activity where they will get to know the youth minister and other teenagers of the church.

Youth revival week

The goal of this activity is to awaken the young people so they not become discouraged in regards to

the ministry and personal growth. The week's leaders can be young people from another church, university, or even another country. In some cases the church may want to call on an adult who has particular experience with teenagers.

Evangelism through a learning activity

Every believer has certain interests or talents that can easily be shared with others. While teaching a unique class we can evangelize the lost. Always keep in mind that evangelism can become a natural part of our daily lives by way of personal spiritual gifts and the personality the Lord has blessed us with. It might not seem likely that auto mechanics or a sport are very useful in winning the lost, but it can be a very effective medium to get to know someone and gain their respect and attention. Using these abilities to cultivate a friendship, the Lord will bless with many opportunities to openly testify to what God is doing in our lives.

Everyone should take a personal spiritual inventory in order to know what his or her gifts, talents, and abilities are that might be used for God's glory. Some suggestions include:

auto mechanics

guitar (or other musical instrument)

a sport

painting

computers

crafts

sewing

cooking