

Gift-Giving Tips

For Youth and Volunteers

'Tis the Season for conversations about gifts ... no, not only holiday gifts — gifts for your youth, young adults, and volunteers! It seems like every year, the timing sneaks up on us youth workers and faith formation leaders. We get through kickoff, then it's registering for summer trips, Advent and Christmas traditions, *all* the meetings in January, then we are planning for Spring traditions, graduations, sign-ups for summer and gifts!

Gifts are a tricky business. Each year, there are social media conversations, often from new youth workers, who ask about some helpful ideas for volunteers and youth. Here are some ideas and tips to get you through this process:

VOLUNTEER GIFTS

Volunteers make church happen, so build in some kind of volunteer appreciation into your budget.

If possible, Shop Independent (or local)

Yes, it is always handy to get an online gift card to a big box store, but what about thanking volunteers by getting them all gift cards to a local breakfast place. It gives people an opportunity to feed themselves or their families, and it puts money back into our community. Maybe you can order a set of devotionals from a [local book store online](#) or from independent artists, like these [pen + ink art pieces from Chandler Guess](#).

Everything is Contextual

Think about / ask around about traditions in your faith community. What means something to your particular faith community?

- Make donations to honor your volunteers by directing funds or items to causes they are passionate about.
- If you are in a smaller church who is great at feeding folks; perhaps you gather your volunteers for a meal at someone's home where they just gather and eat together, and don't have to do any of the serving. It doesn't have to be expensive to be meaningful.
- Ask children/youth/adults to make notes or color in a blank journal for your volunteers.
- Take them out for a fun evening - maybe it's bowling, a hike, or conversation over a meal. The key is to set aside time where they take a break from leading and you can build community together.
- Consider a way to recognize and thank the volunteers publicly perhaps with a thank you in a newsletter or named as a thanksgiving in worship.

YOUTH GIFTS

This is always a difficult topic. What is your budget? Do you get everyone the same gift? How much is too much? When do you give gifts? For milestones? Again, it is about context. It's always good to give your youth agency. So ask them: how can the church support you in your life of faith? Youth have asked for devotionals, or recommended websites or Bible apps.

For those who aren't sure what they want or need, here are some thoughts:

- **Bibles:** A kid's Bible is wonderful, but as children approach adolescence, they need a Bible that invites them to ask deeper questions.
 - Consider giving a children's Bible, that is *not* a story bible, [like Deep Blue](#), to all of your early readers and then, as youth are moving into your youth program, gift them a study Bible, to use at home and in your faith community. Try the [CEB study Bible](#) or [The Harper Collins Study Bible](#). This could coincide with Confirmation class. [Here](#) are some other thoughts about bibles for older children/younger youth.
- **Pocket crosses and pocket labyrinths:** These are a nice non-phone option for your fidgeters who like to have something in their pocket during worship or gatherings.
- **High School Graduates:** Practical gifts win out in this category. Starting a new season of life is expensive, so how do you support these young adults as they move forward?
 - A go to gift for high school graduates is a blanket. (Idea adapted from Rev. Michelle Thomas-Bush.) Add the person's monogram and/or the church logo to the blanket. It's useful no matter where that young adult plans to spend the next five years of their lives.
 - College/young adult kits. (Idea from Alma Reyes, Manager of Children and Youth Programs at the Stewpot.)
 - Your kit doesn't have to include all of the items below, but here is a list of what it can include:
 - Utensil sets
 - Office supplies: pens, highlighters, paper clips
 - Blank journals or notebooks
 - Travel mugs
 - First aid kit
 - Extra chargers with multi-plug options
 - Flashlight
 - COVID tests
 - Coffee gift card
 - Twin XL sheet set
 - Travel sized sewing kit
 - Laundry soap pods
 - Backpack, bag, or toiletry basket

Whatever your budget, youth workers, formation leaders and volunteers have limited time to spend, so make the gifts personal and intentional, but not elaborate! Whatever you choose, think about how your gifts reflect your churches' values and connects to your larger family of ministries.

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