

Collective Youth Ministry

“Home wasn’t a set house, or a single town on a map. It was wherever the people who loved you were, whenever you were together. Not a place, but a moment, and then another, building on each other like bricks to create a solid shelter that you take with you for your entire life, wherever you may go.”

—Sarah Dessen, What Happened to Goodbye.

Let’s face it, youth ministry is a tough job. It can be especially difficult if you do not have the financial means you need or a strong team of volunteers supporting you. If this is you, just imagine how many other youth leaders out there; paid, volunteer or otherwise, are struggling to make big things happen for students as well. A lack of resources or volunteers could be exactly the starting place for your collective youth ministry. The birth of the collective youth ministry model came from the idea that we are better together than we are separate. An ecumenical youth ministry, either for weekly youth group activities or strictly for larger events is about sharing resources, buildings and ideas to create sustainable youth ministry programs. Here are a few steps you can take to start sharing resources:

- 1. Make cold calls/emails:** Nothing says more about a person than the ability to get on the phone and make things happen. It will also show others you are serious. Start calling other youth programs in your neighborhood and town to see if they are interested in partnering to make awesome happen. If cold calls aren’t your style, send cold emails. Invite another youth worker out for coffee and start brainstorming ideas for your students!
- 2. Stick to what you know:** If you’re worried about differences in theology among churches, stick to your denomination. Call churches you know who have a similar theological system and make awesome happen with them.
- 3. Create a critical mass:** If you only have 5 students in your youth group and 4 are home sick, you can’t really have youth group. How unfair for that one faithful kid who was so excited to learn and play at youth group! Partnering with one or more congregations in your neighborhood or town can help ensure that youth group will happen every week!
- 4. Start sharing expenses:** Say your church has 5 students and an annual youth budget of \$3,000. Say the church you have partnered with has twenty-five students, but no youth budget. Together, you have thirty students and \$3,000. Suddenly, the kinds of things you can do just got way cooler and the youth group with twenty-five students finally has the funds to make your collective dreams possible. Besides, playing capture the flag is a whole lot more fun with thirty people than it is with 5.
- 5. Start sharing transportation:** Let’s stick to the example above for the remainder of this Quicksheet. Your church has a fifteen-passenger van, but only 5 students. The church you are partnering with has a twenty-one-passenger church bus, but not enough seatbelts for their whole group. Together, you have thirty-six seatbelts, which is now plenty for your thirty students, drivers and volunteers. If your students pay travel expenses to events, it becomes more affordable for fifteen people to share the gas bill rather than only 5 or 6.

6. **Share your volunteers:** Have you ever been to a youth event where your volunteers outnumber your students? In collective youth ministry, this is a good thing. You might partner with a church that has twenty-five students, but zero success in recruiting volunteers. Your addition of 5 qualified volunteers can help in fulfilling their liability needs. In addition to meeting student to leader ratios, the voices of these extra volunteers will be influential in mentoring your students. The people who youth surround themselves with have a deep impact on the kind of individuals they become. Running a program with an adequate number of volunteers will pay off in droves. Everyone wins.
7. **Share the load:** If you are running your own youth program solo, you have to write the youth group plan every week. What games will we play? What lesson will I teach? What stories can I share to drive the point home? If 2 youth leaders are joined together to run youth group, you just cut your responsibility for creating a youth plan in half. You can team-teach and share ideas to make a better lesson each week, or you can rotate weeks and only run youth group twice a month. This will free up your time to do other ministry things, like attend sporting events, have coffee with students or visit youth at school lunch. If you have a family, a plan like this is particularly ideal as it frees up a few hours in your week for other responsibilities. If many theological viewpoints are present among teaching leaders, your students' faith journeys will be informed by a myriad of beneficial voices and traditions. Another aspect of sharing the load is the ability to share buildings. Maybe the church down the street has a bigger building for night games or a better youth room for lock-ins. There are so many ways to share the load.
8. **Create a community:** We were made to live in community. Look at the stories in the Bible. Jesus always gathered people together to do ministry. His followers were sent out 2 by 2 to do work. When you run a collective youth ministry you're going to make some good friends and partners in ministry. The relationships built between paid staff and volunteers will be interconnected in the way God intended for His church.
9. Many denominations in the Christian faith are saying the same thing with different nuances and values they deem important. At the heart of our message is the same pillar: Jesus Christ is Lord, our sins are forgiven and we are loved. The Church, Capital C-meaning ALL OF US, is better together than it is separate. We each have something to learn from each other's collective experiences. The church is the people and together we are capable of so much more than we are on our own.

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