

Summer Ideas

For people who work with youth, summer is far from a time for vacations. It is often THE busiest time for ministry and programming. MORE trips, MORE activities, and MORE contact time with the youth of our church. So, as we roll into another busy summer, here are some ideas! Use them to connect with that “summer fun” attitude.

Sabbath

One idea might be to take stock of how busy we are and how busy our youth are—both during the school year and during the summer—and intentionally plan some Sabbath time. This may mean blocking out certain weeks when you don’t have programming or contact youth. Instead, set aside time to read, pray, walk, or do something that is renewing to your spirit. Beforehand, you might let the youth and their parents know which weeks you are practicing Sabbath living. It is helpful to give parents an article or something you compose about young people and “time off” or sabbath time. Help them understand why it is important to honor a season, and a stage of life, with an ease in schedule. Invite parents to spend time that week doing some of the same things. You could suggest some books or great walking trails. You could even plan a get together following the sabbath time to talk about your week and how you were renewed.

Create a sabbath “schedule” or calendar. Literally, list one simple restorative activity or practice a day—for each day of your suggested sabbath time. Example: Monday—Upon waking, say a brief prayer of gratitude, thanking God for the day ahead and asking God for wisdom. Tuesday—Take a walk. Notice the signs of life or toys, gardens, flags, etc. Simply be aware of others. Wednesday—Practice random acts of kindness. Plan a week of restful, mind-centering, worshipful activities to help the youth have downtime.

Picnic-Worship. Ask youth to bring a picnic lunch and meet you at a designated park, lake, nature trail or town square for food, fellowship, and worship. You could do this for breakfast and start off the day with morning prayer. It could end with a leisurely walk or going to do a service project.

Explore Spiritual Disciplines Together. Take time each week to look at one of the spiritual disciplines with the youth. Set out to practice that discipline for the week. Some disciplines include silence, gratitude, and hospitality. Create a Facebook group or a blog for you and the youth to post updates explaining how things are going with that discipline and to encourage one another.

Sacred Sites. Together, visit some nearby sacred sites and discuss how these are sacred to the folks who created them or how they feel sacred to your group. This might be the courtyard of a church, an Indian mound, or a sanctuary of another religion. Use the time to reflect on what it takes for something to have sacred meaning. Discuss how something as simple as having coffee in a coffee shop may be ordinary to one person, but sacred to another.

Snap Vacation Sites. If your youth will be scattered for much of the summer, ask them to send a photo of where they are to you and other group members so that everyone can keep in touch. Use the photos as a way to remind the group to pray for one another. As they receive photos, they can thank God for that person and offer a prayer for traveling mercies.

Relational

Summer may be a great time for you to get to know the youth better and for them to get to know one another better. Without curfews or having to compete with schoolwork, plan time for conversation and relaxation.

Book Club. Choose books that aren't too long so that youth can finish them in a timely fashion. If you have some who don't love to read, use articles that they can read fairly quickly and still participate in a discussion. You might invite different youth to come up with a question that comes to mind while they are reading and have the discussion be more youth-lead.

Movie Marathon. This will require snack food as well! Choose a series of movies (Star Wars, Back to the Future, High School Musical, or Harry Potter, etc.) and invite youth for a rainy—or grossly hot—day of lounging around, chatting and watching a series unfold from start to finish. Don't worry about discussion of the movie (though that could happen). Just let it be a fun, long day or evening together. Depending on the series, between movies you could play a quick game related to the theme to get everyone to move around a little. Hint: Watch ratings when you choose a movie to be sure it is appropriate. It may be a good idea to always let parents know what movies will be shown.

Movie Discussion. Choose a movie that deals with a theme or an issue that you can discuss afterwards. Before viewing the film, you might ask everyone to be thinking about a certain question or to be aware of a character that they can relate to or a scene they might find disturbing—some way to help them engage in the study as the movie is playing.

In-Home Bible Study. Invite your group over to your house for a Bible study. Make sure other adults are present. Lock-In. A lock-in may be a great way to bring back some summer fun. Think sidewalk chalk murals, colored bubbles, catching fireflies, and churning home-made ice cream.

Plain Old Fun

You know your group . . . and maybe they just really want some active, crazy, fun days with their friends. So, invite them to invite a friend to come along and try some of these adventures.

Geo-caching. Geo-caching is a type of treasure hunt that uses a GPS to seek containers. Explore your area using a smart phone. Share what you have discovered and what others have left behind. Make a plan with your youth to hide an item that symbolizes your summer together.

Ice Cream Social and Scavenger Hunt. Invite recently graduated fifth graders, along with the upcoming seventh and eighth graders to an ice cream social at the church. Make ice cream sundaes. Let them get to know one another through questions like: Would you rather have ice cream or cake? Chocolate or vanilla? Chocolate syrup or caramel? Would you rather have sprinkles or chocolate chips? Bowl or cone? Waffle or regular cone?

After devouring the yummy treats, split the group into teams. Provide clues to a scavenger hunt that allows them to explore the church in new ways.

Challenge Courses or Adventure Sports. Depending on where you live, you may have opportunities for youth to participate in fun, outdoor group-building activities like rafting, canoeing, zip-lining, bike trails, etc. Each of these activities requires teamwork and encouragement, life skills that groups can build upon throughout the summer to start the school year upholding one another.

Ultimate Challenge. Challenge another church's youth group to a tournament of Ultimate Frisbee, kick ball and bowling. End at an air-conditioned bowling alley! You might eat and worship together to end the day.

Explore Your City or Town. We often live someplace and don't spend time exploring its sites. Go on a ghost tour or visit places that you went to as a child but have not been back. Take a cemetery hike to find out about the history of who was buried in your town. What if you didn't have a car in your town? Spend a day figuring out how you would get to work, or to shop, or to the doctor's office by riding the bus or walking.

Service

VBS After Hours. During the week of VBS, you have direct access to youth who are volunteering with the children of the church. Why not capitalize on their presence by offering a combination of fun and missions each day? Head to the bowling alley for pizza and a game, then spend a few hours serving at a local animal shelter. Go to the movies following VBS, and afterwards sort food at a food bank. Make sandwiches to pass out with water bottles to the homeless, then visit a museum. Many homeless shelters do not serve lunch, so this could be a way to assist folks who are a part of the houseless community.

Destination Mission or Destination Serve. Invite youth to participate in a service mission. Tell them when to show up at the church, what they need to bring, and the kind of clothes to wear. Do not tell them their destination. Make arrangements to show up at a local organization that could use some youth to help wash their bus, paint shelves, or beautify their outdoor area. This is a great opportunity to help the youth discover new service opportunities throughout your city.

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