

No Youth “Youth Ministry”

Wait! What?

We can only hope that churches see that investing in the next generation is important for passing on their faith and enriching the reign of God and God’s love. But some churches don’t have many young people – or none at all – within their walls or on their rolls. Still, there is a call to “go into the world” to reach the young people in the community and extended families of members of their congregation.

A good plan to reach young people in the community needs some preparation and planning. You can start by answering these questions such as these:

- Who are the young people in the community? What are their ages, grades, parents’ names, needs, etc.
- What is already going on for young people in the community? For parents? For grandparents?
- How can our church help?
- Who can help identify?
- Who feels called to participate in this ministry?

Here are some ideas for how a church can do youth ministry when it has no youth:

Tutoring program

Establish a tutoring program in connection with a school or community center to help young people who are struggling through certain subjects. Having an adult who is willing to teach them skills they need to accomplish their goals in school helps build self-confidence and create relationships with adults who care.

School volunteers

Local schools are always looking for volunteers. This is a great way to connect with young people in the community. Having a connection through the PTA or school is beneficial. Background checks with fingerprinting may be required. Being a part of their lives on a daily basis can.

“Adopt” a grandchild or be a big brother/big sister

Can we have too many caring adults in the lives of young people? Young people need not just positive role models, but adults who are present in their lives. Sharing a meal, reading a book together, working on homework, playing a board game, riding a bike, or throwing around a sports ball are just a few ideas of ways to connect with young people. We like to know that people care and encourage us, want to spend time with us. Young people are no different. Regardless of parental involvement, all young people need caring adults in their lives.

Community center programs

Working with the local community center offers an existing model or base for planning and implementing a program. Connect with the local community center, see what’s currently being offered, and sponsor a program or event to meet the needs of the young people and parents/grandparents in the community.

Host an event

If there is no nearby community center, plan an event that's fun for young people. It doesn't have to be vacation Bible school- it can be a one-day event to get people together and have fun. After all, where there are kids, there are also adults! Rent some inflatables, have a video gaming area, host a giveaway (ask a local business to donate gifts cards or a game system), and provide free drinks and snacks.

Community Cookout

Use the church property as a place to host a community event that everyone will love – one that has food! Whether you're able to fund the food yourself or you host a bring-your-own-dish event, this is a great way to get to know people in the community and enjoy time together.

Community service ministry

Plan a community wide service project. There are many needs in every community. Choose a project, meet at a location, divide into groups, and engage in the service ministry you have selected. Afterward, have lunch, dinner, or another event to gather together and celebrate.

Parents' Night Out

Offering parents a break with top-quality care is a gift and true witness to the families surrounding your church. Whether it's for a date night with their partner, help during a busy holiday season, or just some quiet time, it's a nice reprieve and more comforting than leaving the teens home alone.

Young people also enjoy any opportunity to gather with friends.

Project Graduation

Several communities hold "project graduation" programs to give high school seniors a safe place to have fun after graduation. If your community has one, find out how your church can be involved. If your community has one, find out how your church can be involved. If your community doesn't have one, research how your church can begin one.

Mentoring seminars

Offer seminars to adults who want to mentor young people. Older adults are often afraid to approach teens or may wonder what, if anything, they have to offer. A training seminar on how to be a mentor could help relieve some of that anxiety and lead adults to realize their gifts and how they can minister to young people. Mentoring programs can run the gamut of issues and abilities: following a budget, setting up a blog or website, job interview skills, cooking, gardening, babysitting, prayer partners, cooking lessons, garden keeping, babysitting lessons, arts and crafts, etc.

Sponsor a sports team

Sports can provide an opportunity for your congregation to shine. If you have a trusted team of people who are interested in sports, start a community league. Sporting events often have the ability to prompt participation.

Host athletic leagues

Existing sports programs need a place to practice and play. If your church has a facility, consider offering it for sports use or as a practice sport for teams. If you don't have a facility, connect with local sports team coordinators, and find out how you can be of service. Adult volunteers are always needed.

Offer your church as a meeting spot

Churches can be great places to host fundraisers, PTA meetings, or even farmers' markets. Find out what your community's space needs are and then offer your building to help fulfill them.

Offer assistance to members' extended families

Do the families of any of your members have needs? Offer to help. Beginning a caregiving ministry is an excellent way to minister to others and assist during times of need. There are many ways to help, such as:

- Picking up kids from school
- Driving kids to various activities
- Caring for kids when a parent is out of town or infirmed
- Providing a meal to stressed or infirmed family
- Cutting the grass for the family of a deployed military member

Care packages for grandchildren

Kids love gifts. Send care packages to young people who are connected with the church. Birthdays, holidays, or just to show you are thinking of them, are wonderful opportunities to connect with young people.

Ask parents and grandparents what they need!

Just ask. It's hard for some people to ask for assistance. So, let's ask them what they need.

Things to keep in mind

Stay current on abuse prevention and safe ministry with minors.

As in regular youth ministry, a church and its leadership must practice strict abuse prevention when seeking to accompany young people. Have annual background checks done by a reputable company for all adult volunteers and ministry leaders. Pastoral staff should meet with adult leaders (or defer to an abuse prevention specialist) annually to review healthy boundaries, expectations, and abuse prevention policies.

Recognize what your people are already doing.

Find out what's already going on in the community. We don't want to reinvent the wheel. Don't compete. Find out what needs are not being met.

Stay away from trendy stuff.

Following the latest fad just confuses the institution of the church. You want to look for needs of your community. Determine what that culture is and how to impact it. Your church should find its own vision for youth ministry. That vision should translate to a mission statement that is in line with the church.

Do a few things well.

Don't try to do it all. Start out with one or two ideas that you can do well. Match your talents with the needs and desires of the community and congregation.

Look for ways to partner with existing churches and organizations.

When we come together, the body of Christ is strengthened. Discover ways you can partner with another church or organization to make an existing program even better or how you can meet a need by working as a team.

Author: Susan Gyura

Project Manager: Gina Yeager-Buckley

