

## Beginnings: How to Start a Youth Group

"We must never underestimate the importance of beginnings; for beginnings shape directions, and directions shape lives. All too often we overlook beginnings as though they were nothing, for beginnings are not history but Potential." -New Covenant Community

Beginnings are turning points in people's lives. They are often emotional, partly because beginnings are points where the unknown is what is coming. In the life of a youth group, two types of beginnings exist: beginning something new and beginning again from something old.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:1—2). The biblical creation story is a good example of beginning something new. God creates something out of nothing. As co-creators with God, we can start a youth group where one was not before. Out of the void comes youth ministries in your local congregation.

The other type of beginning comes out of perhaps only a temporary lull, not a void. Youth ministries can get a fresh start after an old program has died away. The group may be small or may no longer exist. This kind of beginning is somewhat like the story of the mustard seed (Matt. 13:31—32). A tiny seed of commitment has the potential to grow into a group that can meet the needs of many people.

### Watch It Grow

You have been asked to lead a youth group. What does that mean? By now you probably have heard lots of things about fun and community and ministry. Here are some suggestions about what to do to help your group get started and grow in the first six months:

#### Month One

- Compile address lists.
- Write letters of introduction, one to parents and one to young people.
- Call each young person on the phone.
- Find curriculum and resources at your congregation.
- Visit the senior high Christian education classes.
- Talk with your clergy and Christian education coordinator.
- Announce a get-together for parents and young people in the bulletin.

#### Month Two

- Use the get-together as a planning meeting for youth and parents.
- Choose planning team members.
- Pick a time and place for weekly youth group meetings.
- Decide whether to combine or separate junior and senior highs.
- Collect resource material.
- Plan a planning retreat.

### Month Three

- Mail out first issue of the newsletter.
- Begin planning team meetings.
- Write another letter to parents for update.
- Make a time line for the next three months.
- Put together an interest survey.

### Month Four

- Begin weekly meetings of the youth group.
- Have the young people on the planning team report to session.
- Meet one-on-one with each young person for feedback and evaluation.
- Update the mailing list.

### Month Five

- Find ways to involve young people in congregational worship.
- Have the planning retreat for all young people and advisors.
- Look for diocesan and provincial events that involve youth.

### Month Six

- Meet in a brainstorming session to plan for the next six months.
- Suggest rotation in planning team members.
- Have the young people write an article for the newsletter.
- Dream with the planning team at their next meeting.

### How Are You Doing?

The first six months of a program will get mixed reviews, but it is very important to be in tune with what is going on. That means continuous planning, doing, and evaluating. Ideally, this should happen all the time, yet in the beginning it may mean a matter of life or death for the program.

Even if you say "Don't ask" in one area of your program, the other areas may be doing fine. All parts of the body do not grow at the same speed, so don't be surprised at your group's growing pains.

The reason for evaluating — asking "How are you doing?" — is certainly not to make anyone feel bad about the areas of youth ministries in your congregation that are not going so well. It is to help young people and adults be aware of places where energy needs to be spent. In the process, commitment to the group and to its purpose should develop. Joint ownership and responsibility for what happens will make a better group.

Here are some suggestions as to how they you can develop a program in relational youth ministries. You will have plenty of other ideas and ways that you can evaluate your program.

### Call to Discipleship

- Bible study
- Adopt a grandparent

- Discussion on prayer
- Study about the disciples
- "Bring a friend" outing

### Respond to the Needs

- Interest survey
- Adding youth on planning team
- Group brainstorming sessions

### Partnership

- Youth ministries planning team
- Cluster congregations
- Painting the youth group room
- Social action projects and mission projects

### Be Connected

- Participation in worship leadership
- Intergenerational events
- diocesan and provincial events
- participation in the Episcopal Youth Event
- Ecumenical youth events
- Episcopal camps and conference centers

### Be Inclusive

- Cultural diversity programs and training
- "Companion" youth groups
- Including parents in the planning and dreaming