

## Forming a Youth Council in Your Church

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The following descriptions are the composite ideas for a Youth Council in a **medium to large** church. See page 14 for ideas on how to adapt for a **small** congregation.

### What is a Youth Council?

A Youth Council is a small group of people from your congregation who love God and love youth.

### Who should be on a Youth Council?

- Equal numbers of adults and youth...but, if your numbers are unequal, have more youth than adults. An ideal size, depending on the size of your congregation, is three youth and three adults.

### What is the purpose of the Youth Council?

The Youth Council

- Has the “big picture” of youth ministry in mind; the Youth Council offers planning, coordination and oversight of the whole youth program
- Plans and evaluates the yearly youth program
- Watches for and encourages people who might make a contribution—small or big—to the youth program

### What are the advantages of having a Youth Council?

- A group of committed people keeps youth interests and concerns before the congregation. (This is much better than having one or two individuals do this. They may begin to feel burdened with the “youth work.”)
- The Youth Council is often able to identify leaders/teachers who may help with *one or two* events but are not willing to be the *whole-year* youth leader.
- A Youth Council generally makes a commitment for a year and each member may or may not stay on in the position for a second year. This reduces the sense that youth ministry can sometimes be a “life sentence.”

### How often will the Youth Council meet?

This is left to the discretion of each congregation. This might be the pattern of meeting time:

- June, July or August:** Meet to plan for the functional year which starts in September
- September:** Meet to check that leaders and teachers are in place and equipped for their task
- November:** Check in regarding Advent and Christmas plans
- February:** Check in regarding Lent and Easter and/or school break activities
- May:** Evaluate what worked well and what needs revision

### What are the main components of a youth program?

A well-rounded youth ministry offers these four things: Opportunity to:

1. learn (e.g. Bible study)
2. worship (e.g. play in a praise band or read scripture in church)
3. serve (e.g. work at a soup kitchen)
4. have fun with Christian friends (e.g. go mini golfing)

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It is possible to only offer “learning” activity or “worship” activity or “service” activity or “fun” activity, but the ideal is to provide a selection from each category—rather like a buffet. The young people make a commitment to be part of a particular activity rather than commit themselves to the entire program. The underlying assumption is this: If teens pick activities they enjoy and believe that they can make a difference, they will be active participants in the program and not just “consumers.” In all four components, leadership skills of the youth are encouraged.

## How can I adapt the Youth Council idea to a small church?

It may be that your congregation only has three or four teens. In this case, you could try some of these ideas:

- Every teen is on the Youth Council, matched with two adults.
- One or two interested teens are on the Youth Council along with guest youth from the community or a neighbouring church.
- Instead of offering all the choices you see on page 16, simply limit the choices to ones for which you can find a leader.

An excellent resource for small churches is *Single Digit Youth Groups: Working With Fewer Than 10 Teens*, Marcey Balcomb, Abingdon, 2004.

Additional information on forming a Youth Council may be found in *Teaming Up: Shared Leadership in Youth Ministry*, by Ginny Ward Holderness, Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.



## How can we get started?

**Step 1:** Gather together some people who love God and love youth. Begin by using an evaluation chart like this:

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| Activities/<br>programs<br>we are<br>currently<br>doing | What type<br>of activity/<br>program is<br>this?<br>(classify it as<br>primarily<br>worship,<br>learning,<br>serving, or<br>fun) | What are<br>the things<br>we love<br>about this<br>activity/<br>program? | What are<br>things that<br>are really<br>difficult<br>about this<br>activity/<br>program? | Do we want<br>to continue<br>this activity/<br>program? |
|---|--|--|---|---|
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|   |  |  |   |   |

**Step 2:** Use markers or crayons to **colour code** the activities you are already doing. The colours help you see patterns more clearly.

- Learning=green
- Worship=yellow
- Service=blue
- Fun=red

Pause for reflection. Is your youth ministry currently well-rounded? If not, what is missing?

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**Step 3:** After you have done an evaluation, **brainstorm ideas** of what might be possible in your congregation. Your “plan for the year” can take the form of a letter. Remember to colour code all activities/programs so you are planning a well-rounded youth program.

Dear (name):

You are an important part of (name your church). Consider how you would like to be involved this year. Look over these options. Check off ones that interest you. Feel free to sign up with a friend.

**Return this form by mail.** Your leaders will be in touch.

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <p><b>Combos:</b> Sunday morning Bible Study. Enjoy an egg McMuffin or breakfast sandwich as you study<br/>         Gr. 7&amp;8: 9:30 a.m.<br/>         Gr. 9-12: 10:15 a.m.</p>  | <p><b>Praise Band:</b> If you play an instrument, join Reuben St. Louis for a weekend and learn how to be a praise band for worship. Semi-regular jam sessions follow.</p>                            | <p><b>Yearly Spring Canoe Trip;</b> Go into training with a group of adventurers; enjoy paddling, camping, campfires, devotions, singing.</p>                                   |
| <p><b>MYA</b>—Monthly youth activity (Friday nights). Grades 7-8 and Grades 9-12. Break into two groups for fun activities—hay rides, skating, bowling, fishing trip, learn dances, cooking...</p>  | <p><b>Yearly Fast:</b> Join other churches for an annual fast to raise money for HIV/AIDS relief in Africa.</p>   | <p><b>Personal Reflection:</b> Sign up for a Bible reading program that you can do at your own pace at home.</p>  |
| <p><b>Fundraising Events</b>—Choose to be part of a fundraising team to raise money for the food bank, AIDS relief in Africa, helping the mission trip team. Host a potato dinner, salad bar after church, plant pink flamingos.</p>                              | <p><b>Local Mission:</b> Make a difference in our own area—help gather and sort food for the food bank, make sandwiches for an outreach ministry, distribute signs throughout the town/city, etc.</p> | <p><b>Worship:</b> Be part of a readers' guild—do play readings in church, read scripture or prayer, do liturgical dance, design PowerPoint presentations, become an usher.</p> |
| <p><b>Volunteer</b>—Do 40 hours of community service at the church. Run a Christmas party, lead Vacation Bible School, help lead a March Break camp, lead a family night at the church, host a fall carnival or organize a parking lot BBQ for the community.</p> | <p><b>Do you have an idea of something you would like to do?</b></p> <p><b>Are you good at something and would like to lead others in doing it?</b></p>   | <p>Your name.....</p> <p>Address.....</p> <p>Age.....</p> <p>E-mail:.....</p> <p>Phone: .....</p>   |

Education for the Faith

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**Step 4:** Divide the list of youth in your congregation and stay in touch...stay in touch...stay in touch.

- Call each teen and tell them that they will be receiving a letter from the Youth Council, inviting them to be active in programs or activities that interest them.
- Send them letters.
- Make an up-to-date mailing list/e-mail list. E-mailing is a good way to stay in touch.
- If you don't receive the completed form back, call again and give a gentle reminder.
- Even though a teen has not "signed up" for an activity, you can send an e-mail reminder of a specific activity. People do change their minds.