

FOR LEADERS OF

CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRY

Organizing a Youth Council for our Church – A Personal Journal

Getting Started

While talking with Linda Ashfield, one of the ministers in Knox, Waterloo, ON, she talked about the large percentage of youth who are actively engaged in the congregation. How did they do this? They:

- have an active commitment by the ministers to relate to youth. She considers it a challenge to see how she can engage every single youth in the life and ministry of the congregation.
- have a large cadre of leaders who are not “permanent.” That is, a group of leaders may lead a mission trip to Winnipeg while another group takes the youth on retreat. This spreads the responsibility for youth leadership in the congregation and helps adults become more concerned with the youth and their issues.
- plan interesting and enticing activities, including the mid-week Logos program, so there are lots of entry points.

Can we do this, too, I wondered?

The youth in our church (St. Andrew’s, Newmarket, ON) are somewhat regular in worship attendance but, over the years, the numbers in our Friday night youth programs (junior and senior youth every second week) slowly dwindled. Would a youth council—with equal numbers of youth and adults—help us take a new look at youth ministry in our church? We gave it a try. If we can learn from another church, maybe you can learn from us...and we hope to learn from you.

Both congregations described in this article have at least 25 youth on their church roles. If you have a small number of youth, remember that you can still create a youth council in your congregation. You may:

- do it on a presbytery basis
- do it on an ecumenical basis in your community
- do it on a smaller scale

Remember: Youth ministry does not have to be a *program*. **Youth ministry is your congregation’s particular way of engaging youth in a meaningful way in the work, study, fun and service of your church.**

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Writer—Dorothy Henderson

Beginning the Journal

<p>September</p> <p>Our youth council has met for the first time. We have four youth (Tiffany, Sarah, Ian, Angie) and six adults. Our agenda: We go over some of the ways that a youth council might work.¹ We brainstorm ideas for some of the activities we would like to do together. I offer to do it up like a calendar for the year. We mailed it to all the youth on our mailing list.²</p>	<p>Reflections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We are all—adults and youth—feeling our way. Who is the leader? Who are the leaders?• Our progress is slow. The brainstorming takes a long time.• Are the youth overwhelmed because there are more adults than youth?• How much responsibility should each group—youth/adults have? We adults want to give the youth more responsibility but they seem hesitant. In the end Sarah (youth) offers to do minutes and keeps us in touch via e-mail. Tiffany (youth) offers to chair the next meeting.
<p>End of September</p> <p>There is an opportunity for our youth to attend a leadership event at Crieff. Tiffany and Angie attend and come back full of enthusiasm, having learned a lot.</p>	
<p>October</p> <p>Our second youth council meeting. Another youth has been recruited to the council to help balance our numbers. He is enthusiastic and talkative and Tiffany has a hard time keeping the meeting on track. Finally I intervene and introduce the idea of the “talking stick.” Tiffany has playfully brought a gavel so we use it as a way to hear everyone’s voices.</p> <p>We go over a number of things—plans for a leaf-jumping party in November, ideas for a praise band, using the Combos material³ on Saturday afternoons, our “communication plan”, Winterfest in the park (we can raise money for Canada Youth 2006), a fall lock in. Also, as an adult leader, I did a little “input” time—demonstrating how you would use the “Six Thinking Hats” to come to a good decision.</p>	<p>Reflections</p> <p>As an adult leader, I’m feeling frustrated. Have we taken on far more than we can handle? Are the young people on the council representative of the rest of the 25 high school youth in our church? It seems to me that we’ve started too late in the year. People are busy and it seems as if we will not get things rolling until November.</p> <p>Another adult leader has taken the lead in getting people prepped for starting a praise band.</p>

¹ I used the ideas from *Teaming Up: Shared Leadership in Youth Ministry* by Ginny Ward Holderness (Westminster John Knox Press, 1997)

² See page 4 of this newsletter.

³ *Combos for Youth Groups*, Abingdon Press, 2004. Comes in three volumes.

<p>November</p> <p>We have our first Saturday Combo event—food, fun, study. It’s Saturday afternoon and only three youth attend.</p>	<p>Reflections</p> <p>I’m sure Ian, the youth leader, must feel discouraged by the turnout. The kids who came enjoyed it, though.</p>
<p>December</p> <p>After receiving a reminder from one of the ministers, 21 youth show up for the Christmas lock-in. They enjoy games, food, study, movies and emerge bleary-eyed in the morning.</p>	<p>Reflections</p> <p>Lock-ins are, and have been very popular in our church over a number of years. What is it that youth enjoy about them? Could it be that lock-ins are the centre around which the youth ministry revolves?</p>
<p>January</p> <p>We hold our second Saturday Combo event—food, fun, study. It’s Saturday and only three youth attend. One is the leader.</p> <p>The three youth and four adults who have come chat informally about “Plan B.” Even though the Combos idea is great and the resource is great, the monthly Saturday afternoon time is obviously not working.</p> <p>We also discover that our communication lists are incomplete and faulty. Another adult leader and I offer to upgrade the lists by phoning all the youth.</p> <p>We have a youth council meeting scheduled for later in the month.</p>	<p>Reflections</p> <p>Are we trying to do things at the wrong time? After all, the time we most often see the youth at our church is at lock-ins and on Sunday morning. Should we be offering “Breakfast Combos” during one of the worship times? Should we be breaking up the youth into grades 9-10 and 11-12? Perhaps when we get our lists complete this week we can poll the youth and see what they think of a Sunday morning program? Ohh....this grates on me....I’ve always been a big let-the-children-and-youth-be-in-youth-friendly-worship kind of person. Still, I tell myself, if we do it every other week, the leaders can encourage the youth to be in church on the alternate weeks.</p>

.....to be continued....

**Have you created a youth council?
Have you tried and failed?
Tried and succeeded?
Let me know.
We can learn from each other.**

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A Sample of the Letter Sent out to Youth in September

Dear (name)

You are an important part of St. Andrew's 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>Combos: Saturday afternoon, 1:30 p.m. - 3 p.m.. Enjoy fun, food, study as you learn and play together.</p> <p>Junior and Senior Youth evenings—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, etc.</p>	<p>Praise Band: 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>Yearly Fast: Join other churches for the yearly fast to raise money for HIV/AIDS relief in Africa.</p>	<p>Yearly Spring Canoe Trip; Go into training with a group of adventurers; enjoy paddling, camping, campfires.</p> <p>YIM (Youth in Mission) Mission Trip: Raise money and join others to travel to El Salvador, Eastern Europe, Mistawasis (SK) or Peace River (AB). Age 16+</p>
<p>Fundraising Events—Choose to be part of a fund raising 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, sell kilometers of Newmarket, plant pink flamingos.</p>	<p>Local Mission: Make a difference in our own area—help gather and sort food for the food bank, make sandwiches for Evangel Hall, distribute signs in downtown Newmarket, etc.</p>	<p>Worship: Be part of a readers' guild—do play readings in church, read scripture or prayer, do liturgical dance (if this appeals to you), design power point presentations, usher.</p>
<p>40 hours volunteer—We welcome you to do 40 hours of community service at the church. Run a Christmas party, lead Vacation Bible Camp, 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>Do you have an idea of something you would like to do?</p> <p>Are you good at something and would like to lead others in doing it?</p>	<p>Your name.....</p> <p>Address.....</p> <p>Age.....</p> <p>E-mail:.....</p> <p>Phone:</p>