

1

Designing a Youth Ministry Programme

Programming to Meet Needs

1. Needs of Families

No Youth Ministry Programme should ever set out to compete against the family. Some basic family needs are:

- i. The need for communication - communication that goes beyond factual information to opinions, hopes, fears, concerns, and expressions of affection.
- ii. The need for shared experiences - experiences that establish common interests and create memories, both of which strengthen the family.
- iii. The need for healthy authority - authority which is exercised by parents wisely and lovingly, and authority that is respected and obeyed by children.

The youth leader must keep in contact with parents, listening to their concerns and ideas and consulting them over what takes place in the youth programme.

2. The General Needs of Young People

Programming to meet the needs of the young people does not mean that the whole ministry becomes driven by these needs, constantly altering to suit the whims and preferences of young people. Our ministries are to be broadly established on Scriptural principles and appropriate to our church settings (size, resources, characteristics etc.). Within these boundaries there is still a great deal of scope for tailoring our programmes to meet their needs:

Young people experience some general developmental needs that must be borne in mind when preparing youth ministry programmes. These needs are covered in detail in the manual on “Understanding” (Manual 5), but primarily they are for a more mature sense of identity and independence.

There are a number of questions which they need help in answering:

- i. **My beliefs**
What do I believe - about God, life, and spirituality?
- ii. **My worth**
Do people like me? Do I like myself? Does God really love me?
- iii. **My significance**
What am I good at? What do I want to do with my life?
- iv. **My values**
What morals, standards and values do I want to adopt for myself?
- v. **My commitments**
What is important to me? What do I want to invest my time in?
- vi. **My appearance**
Is my physical development normal? Do I have the “right look”?
- vii. **My feelings**
How should I best express my feelings? How do I control my feelings?
- viii. **My relationships**
How do I relate to my parents? How do I relate to my friends? How do I relate to members of the opposite sex?

In coming up with answers to these questions, young people need a safe environment in which they can explore relevant issues with peers and significant adults. The opinions of parents still have some importance but the adolescent is needing to answer these questions for themselves and so needs wider input than what their parents give in formulating their answers.

Young people will respond if the challenge is tough enough and hard enough. Youth wants a master and a controller. Young people were built for God, and without God as the center of their lives they become frustrated and confused, desperately grasping for and searching for security.

- Billy Graham

3. The Specific Needs of Young People

In addition to the general needs of young people, the young people in our youth ministries and communities will have some specific needs, unique to them.

To uncover these needs we need to be asking them questions such as:

- i. What are your interests - are there activities we can incorporate into our youth programme for you and your friends?
- ii. What issues are you facing - what things would you like to discuss and learn about?
- iii. What questions do you have - what things about life and faith do you find hard to understand?
- iv. What are your gifts and abilities - are there ways you could contribute to the youth programme?

We can also ask them questions that will give us a “youth eye” picture of our youth ministry and provide us with some helpful insights in designing programmes.

For example we can ask:

- i. What is the best thing about youth group/church? What things would you change if you could?
- ii. What activities have you enjoyed? What would you prefer we not do again?
- iii. What things would stop you bringing friends? What would encourage you to invite friends?
- iv. How caring, supportive and accepting is our youth ministry?
- v. What things would most help you to grow as a Christian?

All this information can be gathered through surveys, pastoral visits, and/or casual conversations. Leaders can then sift through it and make necessary changes that will meet the needs of the young people while staying true to basic principles and philosophies.

“When I was young I was sure of everything; in a few years, having been mistaken a thousand times, I was not half so sure of most things as I was before; at present, I am hardly sure of anything but what God has revealed to me.”

- John Wesley

4. Building a “Needs Related” Youth Programme

A needs related youth programme can be built as follows:

a. Identify Needs

The first step in building a youth programme that is “needs related” is to identify the needs through:

- Surveys/questionnaires
- Personal interviews
- Casual conversations
- Forums
- Personal

a. Assess Needs

The next step for the leader is to collate the needs and assess them in the light of their experience, training, personal observation and conviction. Questions to ask are:

- What common trends are emerging? What needs can be grouped together?
- How do the apparent needs compare with the understanding and experience I have gained through ministry?
- Based on these needs, what do I want to see happen in our group over the next week/month/term/year? What do the young people need to be able to know, do and be?
- What is the priority of each of these needs?

b. Meet needs

This is the implementation stage where programmes are put into place to meet specific needs. Questions to ask are:

- How do I meet the needs of young people and their families without compromising my own convictions and beliefs?
- What resources, ideas and learning experiences can I use to address these needs?
- How will I know if I am being effective in meeting needs?

7 Laws of Programming (P.E.R.F.O.R.M.)

In the programming principles throughout this workbook: there are seven laws which, while seldom mentioned specifically, underline all the principles outlined. These Laws form an acronym of the word PERFORM and it is in this order that we look at each law:

Four steps to achievement: Plan purposefully, prepare prayerfully, proceed positively, pursue persistently.

- William Arthur Ward

a. The Law of Planning

Effective planning involves a number of tasks including decision making, problem solving, delegation and publicity. To be effective, programmes need to be planned meticulously; with thought given to contingency plans should things go wrong. Some make the mistake of thinking that details are not important, yet the effective leader knows that some details are critical and is able to identify them and do what is best.

b. The Law of Engagement

When young people turn up to a programme they need to know that they are noticed, welcomed and appreciated. They also need reassurance that they belong and have a contribution to make beyond being a passive spectator. Any programme must start with a strategy to “engage” those who have come. It must put them at ease, get them interacting with others, and create in them some anticipation of the rest of the programme.

c. The Law of Research

There are a number of ways to implement the law of research before running programmes. The one we have just covered in the previous session is to find out what young people and their families need. We can also do some research into programmes by reading books, talking with other youth leaders, and keeping a file full of ideas.

d. The Law of Faith

The law of faith in programming reminds us that despite all the principles and ideas that will be covered in this workbook, everything ultimately depends on God. Through faith in Him we are able to implement programmes that have lasting impact. Through faith we take chances and plan significant but risky events.

e. The Law of Ownership

The Law of Ownership means that young people must have a stake in what goes on in the youth programme. They are to be participants, not consumers and so we involve them in the planning and running of programmes. Doing so gives them a sense of ownership and builds commitment within them.

f. The Law of Review

The Law of Review requires that there be some form of assessment after each programme. Each programme should have a clearly stated aim or objective which all the leaders are mindful of. After an event, leaders can then assess the effectiveness of the programmes against their objectives, and learn lessons for future implementation.

Leaders must learn to also practice a personal critique of their own performance. They must learn, as if by habit, to assess what they did, and how they can improve. To help them in this there is a great deal to be gained by finding someone to act as a mentor – someone with wisdom and experience who can ask the right questions and help us debrief our performance honestly.

g. The Law of Motivation

Before a leader can hope to motivate anyone about a programme, they must themselves be enthusiastic and at times will need to “sell” it. They should have clearly in mind the programme’s aims and it’s benefits - what it will deliver. All youth ministries will at times go through difficult periods and through these the leader will need to instil motivation and enthusiasm among the leaders and young people. They will need to keep their eye on the goal and purpose for what they are doing, and direct others to do the same.

¹ What is faith? It is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot yet see. ² God gave his approval to people in days of old because of their faith.

⁶ So, you see, it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that there is a God and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.

- Hebrews 11:1,2,6

Think excitement, talk excitement, act out excitement, and you are bound to become an excited person. Life will take on a new zest, deeper interest and greater meaning. You can think, talk, and act yourself into dullness or into monotony or into unhappiness. By the same process you can build up inspiration, excitement, and a surging depth of joy.

- Norman Vincent Peale

Proceed to page 1 in the workbook and complete the questions

