

DESIGNING A YOUTH MINISTRY PROGRAMME

The purpose of this module is to examine in depth each aspect of a youth ministry programme. We will look at underlying principles and suggest specific strategies.

Before we do this however, we will spend a session taking a broad look at Programme Design.

The module “Youth Ministry Design” takes a detailed look at how to design a Youth Ministry. It concerns structures and overall design in a youth ministry, based primarily on philosophical and theological premises.

This module builds on that one, looking at the specifics of programmes that make up a design. (Note: It is not essential to have done this previous module in order to complete this one.)

In this first session we will look at some general programming principles that need to be kept in mind as we design our programmes.

“If we build to please ourselves, we are building on the sand; if we build for the love of God, we are building on the rock.”
- Oswald Chambers

2. Programming and the Five Practices of the Church

The Five Practices of the Church are based upon an early description of church life:

⁴² They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper and in prayer.

⁴³ A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵ They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need. ⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.

- Acts 2:42-47

These Five Practices must somehow be integrated into the youth programme:

1. Teaching

The developing of an understanding of God's Word, it's relevance and application.

2. Prayer

The developing of a relationship of reliance upon God and intimacy with Him.

3. Fellowship

The developing of relationships with others marked by mutual trust, caring and accountability.

4. Worship

The developing of an appreciation of the person of God, and the actions of God.

5. Mission

The outworking of the other four Practices through which believers share God's message through word and deed.

"Our programmes and our style may reflect our personality and creativity, but God's purposes reflect His plan and love for the church."

- Doug Fields

"Purpose Driven
Youth Ministry"

3. The Three Levels of Programming

The Five Practices can be integrated into a Youth Programme at one or more of three levels:

a. Primary Level Programme

A primary level programme is a regular programme (weekly, fortnightly, monthly) that exists primarily to fulfill the requirements of a single practice.

For example: A weekly prayer meeting; a weekly social activity (fellowship); a monthly visit to a retirement home (service) .

b. Multi-level Programme

A multi-level programme is a regular programme that fulfills the requirements of more than one Practice.

For example: A weekly meeting for small group Bible study and personal prayer (teaching and fellowship); a monthly prayer and worship meeting.

c. A Special Level Programme

A special level programme is one which is held infrequently (less often than once a month). It may fulfill a single Practice or more than one.

For example: A camp (teaching, fellowship, worship); a mission trip (mission); a youth service (teaching, prayer, worship).

"Rigidity is the trademark of legalism, the archenemy of any church on the move. Let legalism have enough rope, and there will be a lynching of all new ideas, fresh thinking, and innovative programs."

- Charles R. Swindoll

4. Programming Factors and Constraints

In integrating the Five Practices into a Youth Ministry Programme, it may be tempting to establish a wide range of programmes that cover all Five Practices at a primary level and to do so in ways that are appropriate for the different stages of commitment of the young people. However, the reality is that there are a number of factors and constraints that programming decisions need to be made based on:

There are many good things we could do in ministry, but only a few that are right.

a. The availability of leadership

Few youth ministries have more leaders than they can use, and existing leaders need to be cared for and not over-worked, if they are to remain involved for the long-haul.

b. The availability of youth

Even if leaders are able to organise an extensive programme, they risk trying to do too much, placing unrealistic expectations upon young people to be attending programmes, thereby spreading numbers attending programmes too thinly. Additional programmes should not be established unless there is a clear need. Programmes held during the week must be done so with school and study requirements in mind.

c. The size of the group

Clearly, the larger the group the more support there will be for a range of programmes.

d. The maturity of the group

A Youth Programme needs to be realistic in assessing the spiritual maturity of the group. For example, a group with limited Christian commitment are unlikely to attend a weekly prayer and worship meeting. Better perhaps to incorporate these aspects as a small part of a Bible Study/Discussion time.

No youth programme can exist in theory. It must be rooted in the reality of a local church, with all its subtle nuances and frustrating annoyances.



Chart your existing programmes on the table below. Write the programme name or description in the left hand column and indicate which of the Five Practice(s) it fulfills by placing a “P” (primary), “M” (multi) or “S” (special) in the appropriate box:

Programme Name	Teaching	F’ship	Worship	Prayer	Mission

Answer the following questions:

1. Are there any “Practices” that are not being covered at any level?

2. Bearing in mind constraints and factors pertinent to your ministry, are there any “Practices” that should be incorporated into the youth programme at a higher level? In other words, is there a Practice at a Multi-level that should be at a Primary Level, or one at a Special Level that should at least be at a Multi-level?

Programming to Meet Needs

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 some significant needs:

1. The 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 ministry programme should enhance these needs and not work against them. The youth leader must keep in contact with parents, listening to their concerns and ideas and consulting them over any proposed changes to the youth programme.

In doing so, both parties need to realise that “you can’t please all of the people all of the time!” While there is value in meeting with parents face to face, it is also good practice to call together all interested parents to discuss issues so that they can hear from each other and appreciate the extent of divergence that may exist on various issues.

“The biggest enemy of the Church is the development and proliferation of programs to meet people's needs. Everyone has a hunger for God, but our tastes (needs) are screwed up. We've been raised on junk food, so what we ask for is often wrong or twisted.”
- Eugene Peterson

2. The General Needs of Young People

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 module on “Adolescence”, 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.

4. The Spiritual Needs of Young People

Not surprisingly, a major responsibility of a youth ministry is to provide opportunity for young people to come to know God and grow in their relationship with Him. To do this we need to identify and understand their spiritual needs, by asking the question, "What do we want these young people to know, do and be, by the time they exit our youth ministry?" Different leaders from different denominations will have different answers and so the following is presented, not as a definitive list, but as an example for leaders to use to develop their own list:

"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

a. To know

- To understand the doctrines of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and salvation
- To know a basic outline of the Bible
- To know the Bible's answers to issues of morality and ethics as they relate to the teenager's life experience
- To know their identity "in Christ"
- To know how to pray and to listen to God's voice
- To know their spiritual gift(s)
- To know how to worship

b. To do

- To have made a commitment of one's life to Christ
- To be involved in some form of ministry, using their gifts
- To have taken responsibility for their own Christian growth through personal Bible study and prayer
- To be able to lead another person to Christ
- To be able to share their testimony
- To be able to practise basic peer counselling skills
- To be adopting wise principles in the use of money
- To be able to identify desirable qualities in a spouse

c. To be

- To be growing in their relationship with Christ
- To be overcoming areas of sin
- To be treating others with respect: parents, authority figures, member's of the opposite sex, etc.
- To be making life choices with reference to, and dependence upon, the will of God
- To be pursuing freedom from emotional scars
- To be able to withstand peer pressure
- To be exemplary in relationships with the opposite sex
- To be secure in who God made them to be
- To be taking responsibility for others' spiritual welfare

5. 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

b. 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?

c. 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

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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 its benefits - what it will deliver. All youth ministries will at times go through difficult periods and through these the leader will need to instill 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*



Assess the extent to which you already apply the Seven Laws of Programming. Respond to the statements below by placing an "x" in the line. Make notes underneath each item in order to clarify your own thinking:

NO _____ YES
"I plan our activities carefully, attending to details, delegating tasks and allowing for contingencies."

NO _____ YES
"I run programmes in such a way as to quickly engage young people and involve them."

NO _____ YES
"I plan programmes by researching young people's needs and other's experience."

NO _____ YES
"I plan programmes with an acute reliance upon God and a willingness to take risks and trust Him."

NO _____ YES
"I allow young people to take ownership of programmes by involvement in them."

NO _____ YES
"I review our programmes and my own role in them, for the purpose of learning and improving."

NO _____ YES
"I motivate others through enthusiasm and optimism even when things are not going so well."

The areas I most want to work on are:

1.

2.

For Further Thought...

Identify what you regard as being the spiritual needs of young people by compiling your own “To know”, “To Do” and “To Be” lists for young people passing through your youth ministry.

