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The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month
by David Woody



Missional youth planning

Summertime is busy for youth ministers. Camps, mission events, water parties, fellowship gatherings and regular group meetings dominate the school break schedule. By the time August rolls around, the summer events wind down, too, giving everyone a much-needed breather. But then, two weeks later, school begins and a new year of youth ministry gets rolling. Retreats, football games and fifth quarters, lock-ins, mission events, and regular group meetings quickly fill the calendar.

Many times, the adults in charge of youth ministry get caught up in the moment of spending time with and mentoring their teenagers. That is a wonderful gift of ministry and is truly living out the call to be the presence of Christ for others. The downfall is that long-term planning for the youth year can easily get overlooked. Instead of planning six months to a year down the road, long-term planning is reduced to deciding on the toppings for the ice cream dessert at the end of the night.

Teenagers have schedules and generally know when they will be busy. The schedule might be dictated to them like a soccer schedule complete with practices or a marching band season with rehearsals and competitions, but teens know what they will be doing in the future. Youth ministry needs to get on their calendars, too. Taking the time to think a couple of months to an entire year ahead will not only help the youth make plans, but will also assist the youth

ministry in planning and completing quality events.

One of the easiest ways to plan a youth ministry year is to take last year's calendar out of the folder and reproduce it for the current year, changing the dates as necessary. Youth come to expect special events at certain times of the year. Some groups have a fall retreat that is the highlight of the year. Failure to

have one would be disastrous for the minister and the entire church. Some groups rally around a big ski trip, a week of youth camp or a week of mission work in the summer.

Another way to plan a youth ministry year is to think missionally. Instead of simply doing the same things as last year, the group takes some time to discern what God is calling the members individually and collectively to do.

Bo Prosser, coordinator for congregational life at Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, defines the missional church this way: "The missional church is about empowering people to discover and use their passions on purpose to be the presence of Christ in their worlds whether anyone joins their church or not!" In a similar vein, we could say that "a missional youth ministry blesses teenagers to discover and use their passions so that they can make a difference in the world for Christ. If others want to join them along the way, that would be great!"

A missional youth ministry can incorporate all the traditions the youth have come to

love and expect and combine them with a year-long emphasis that will make a difference in the lives of the youth and the world.

CBF (www.thefellowship.info) provides some resources that will assist the youth ministry in missional thinking and planning. Daniel Vestal's book, *It's Time* is the backbone resource for a youth study guide of the same name. The guide focuses on one chapter per session. Each session will help the youth to discover aspects about their own passions, about the ministry of CBF and about their individual relationship with God. The book and study guide will help guide where you feel the youth ministry of your church should be heading.

Destinations is a resource for church planning that maps a congregation's missional journey, and can easily be used for youth ministry. The booklet lays out different ideas for an entire year and has a wealth of resources and references to assist in the planning process.

Finally, *Ignite!* is a 12-month youth missions education curriculum. Each month contains a Bible study, a mission study, a mission project idea and a worship suggestion. For churches with volunteer youth leaders, *Ignite!* is a great resource that has a year of regular meetings already planned.

With little time and energy, plans can be made for a year of youth ministry. Planning missionally will help provide focus for the youth and will use their gifts and talents as they seek to be the presence of Christ in the world. Simply having a plan and schedule will help adults spend more time building relationships with the youth and being the ministers they are called to be. **BT**

