A FRAMEWORK FOR YOUNG ADULT MINISTRIES

There is no one "cookie cutter" solution for how to develop a Young Adult Ministry. Wouldn't all our jobs be much easier if there was? Nevertheless, here is a framework you may find helpful as you approach this task.

Some of the points may seem simple; others difficult. Some may make sense immediately; others may take a while to develop. Take some time to work through each point and allow yourself to live in the gray areas between each—you may just find that is where your ministry appears!

1. Go to them (or its easier to hear when you open your ears)—The most important step in developing a Young Adult Ministry is getting to know the young adults in your area. Take the time to sit down and interact with them—at church, at school, or even at the local coffee house. Investing time in your young adults not only shows you care; it also helps you bring the vision for a young adult ministry into focus.

2. Work together (or no person is an island)—Look at the facts about young adults. They are diverse, creative, and unique group of people. The audience of young adults is too diverse for single-minded planning. In other words, don't leave all the thinking/planning up to yourself. Include others—especially young adults!

3. Create an attitude of welcome (or would you like fries with that?)—Your church should be a place of solace and rest for all people, regardless of who they are. Start with a warm smile, a handshake, and a "How are you?". Encourage your congregation to follow suit. Before you know it, you've created a culture that says "You are welcome here."

4. Don't be afraid to sub-set (or how to scratch a niche)—One of the ways to meet the needs of so many different people is to form small groups based on niche needs (e.g., married, single college students, hobby/interest groups, etc). Intimacy, community, and lots of attention can be given to the young adults in the group.

5. Involve YAs in worship (or time to dust off the altar)—Reaching out to young adults starts long before any "official" ministry is developed. It begins with being relevant to young adults in worship. Encourage your pastor to meet each young adult where they are at in planning sermons and worship. Invite young adults to participate by singing, acting, reading, praying, or speaking in worship. You'll find young adults much more interested in worship when they feel they are an integral part of the experience.

6. Try everything (or there's a lot of fish in the programming sea)—When the time comes to change things up, remember to keep your options open. Consider exploring creative approaches to long-standing practices and rituals. Do what makes sense and matters to your people (you're still listening for their needs, right?). Be willing to try and fail—the objective is to make the attempt. Just like with flux, not everything is going to work. But remember, every attempt yields learning.

7. Celebrate everything (or party like it's . . .)—Community building and networking are at the center of the young adult experience. Seek to incorporate these activities as vital part of your ministry. Who doesn't like a party, right? Graduations, promotions, engagements, weddings, new births, getting a new stapler? Celebrate the fact that we are all on a life-long journey of living together. "Fun" can be an agenda item, its ok, I promise!

8. Be prepared for flux (or it can't rain all the time)—Life with young adults is always shifting. Leaders must modify, tweak, invent and re-invent, capture and recapture—continuously. Effective ministry is organic and, just like plants, needs time and nurture to grow into something beautiful. There will be times when things feel rough. "Numbers" may be low, and there may be pressure from "above" to change tactics. You've listened to your people; trust that a growing and effective ministry needs time to flourish. You'll know it when time is moving on. 

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