

Youth Ministry Uncontained

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” - Matthew 18:20

Encountering Christ, being the community of Jesus Christ, people of God — does not require a youth room or a classroom. Most youth leaders have never seen youth ministry as just taking place at the church. They have taken their ministry to ball games, dance recitals, phone calls, lunches out, and more. Now, we, the larger church, need to find ways to encourage our youth to be engaged in the ministry even when they are not at church. We know at least two or three who gather together online, at coffee shops, and other locales, so why not help the youth gather where they already are, but do so as a faith community, and with a spiritual purpose. Here are some suggestions for youth ministry outside your church walls:

Facebook

Set up a Facebook group for your youth group. Make it private to give the youth a social media space where they can speak freely about their faith. Use the page to post photos of your youth at youth events, to post questions for them to comment on, and for you to send encouraging messages throughout the week. Warning: Do not over-post or you may run the risk of youth hiding the information you are trying to share!

Texting

Set up texting groups to send encouraging messages during exam weeks and in the midst of auditions or tryouts; to remind them during spring break, who they are and to whom they belong; to give reminders of upcoming youth events, etc. Texting is also a quick and easy way to share prayer requests.

Tumblr Devotional Blogs

During a season of the church year (Lent, Advent, Eastertide), hand out scripture passages to study together online. Ask people to post their reflections, questions, and prayers on the passage to the Tumblr page. Be sure to include your thoughts on the scripture, too.

Snapchat Group

Create a snapchat group so youth can share photos while at performances, games, and awards ceremonies. This is a great way for youth to lift up and encourage one another, and also share their gifts with the rest of the youth group.

Sonic Happy Hour / Afterschool Yogurt

Every day from 2-4, Sonic Drive-In offers half-priced drinks and slushies. Why not pick one day a week or once a month to meet your youth and treat them to a cold soda or slushy? If your town doesn't have a Sonic, you can also meet them at a yogurt or coffee shop.

Walk and Talk / Exercise Group

Meet youth at a public walking spot. Come up with a topic or question for the walk. As youth walk together, encourage them to discuss the question or theological topic. You might decide to keep track of how many miles you walk each month. This could also lead your youth to sign up to walk together in a walk-a-thon, like Church World Service's Crop Walk, March of Dimes, or Relay for Life. You can even have the youth meet you at a local gym and work out together. The youth group that sweats together stays together!

Faith Outdoors

Plan outings with youth to hike a local trail, go kayaking, zip-lining or more. Amazing ministry occurs when youth have to work together and encourage one another.

Artisan Skill

Many communities have local businesses where youth can paint a canvas or pottery with little to no knowledge. This is a fun way for people to express their creativity and try out a new medium. Plan to talk to the owners of the establishment before your group visits to establish a theme or motif for the artwork. Skills your group may want to try pottery, knitting, painting, quilting, candle making, etc.

Scripture suggestions: **Psalm 139**—I am fearfully and wonderfully made; **Isaiah 64:8**—I am the potter; you are the clay; **Jeremiah 18:1-4**—The pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so, the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him; **Psalm 51:10**—Create in me a clean heart, O God.

Lunch at Schools

Once a month, designate a day when adults who work with youth bring lunch for the youth in your group. Check with your local school for regulations. Be sure to alert parents that you will be visiting their schools, as well. Invite youth to come, sit together, and enjoy lunch.

Breakfast as Church School

Having trouble getting youth to attend Sunday school? Why not take Sunday school on the road? Have youth meet at the church and head out to a local restaurant for bagels and Bible. Hint: You may want to adapt the Sunday school lesson to have little or no supplies. You could even have the youth read the scripture en route since the audience is literally captive. Or, have the youth meet you at the spot outside of the church and then use church transportation to travel together to worship.

Bus Pickup for Mid-Week Programs

Your church might consider picking up youth after school in the middle of the week, to bring them to the church for programs. Each week, entice youth to not spend the bus trip gossiping or complaining about friends or schoolwork. Give them a question or topic to discuss instead. This will help youth who may have had a tough day leave that behind. You might even adapt a game like "would you rather" for a fun distraction to help them get ready for youth group.

As you begin to explore uncontained programs in youth ministry alert parents and the church about the many ways the youth are participating in the life of the church. By communicating, you are helping adults think about ways they can engage. Remind them, the youth are still active even though they may not hear their voices inside the church.

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