

Back to School Kick-Off Event Ideas

It's always fun to start the new school year and youth group year with a special event. The benefits of a kick-off event may include:

- Welcoming the youngest grade of new youth into your group
- Reconnecting after a summer of travel and play
- Including parents during a portion of the event to share an overview of the plans for the upcoming youth group year and let them connect with each other
- Introducing new youth advisors to the group
- Group building by spending a couple of hours or more together engaging in an intentional fun event.

The ideas listed below can be a kick-off during your normal youth group time, a special block of time on the weekend, or as part of a lock-in, retreat, or campout. An overnight experience usually allows the time together needed for new group formation. A couple of hours together provides your group with substantial community building time. Choose what is best for your group and your community's schedule.

The Classics

Classics are “classic” because they have a proven track record: they engage youth year after year and they fit a variety of programs and communities.

- **Progressive Dinner**—Invite three church members to host appetizers, a dinner entrée, or dessert. If walking, the three homes should be within one mile of each other; if you have transportation, the homes should be within a ten-minute drive of each other. If the homes are families of youth, often the youth that live there feel a sense of pride hosting the group, and including a new, younger youth family is a great way to connect with the youngest new participants. Another idea is to use non-youth homes so youth connect with other members in the congregation. Plan for this to be a two-hour event including travel. Spend 30 minutes at the first two homes for appetizers and an entrée, and plan for an hour at the third home for dessert. Invite parents to join the group for dessert. Consider hosting a quick name game at the first home, simply eat at the second home, and play a fun game and/or share information about youth group plans for the upcoming year at the dessert home where the parents join the group.*
- **Pool Party**—Find a youth parent, a church member, or a local public pool with party rental options, and host a classic fun pool party and cookout. Invite parents to join in the fun for the last 30 minutes of the event so the youth have their own space for most of the event, but the parents may return to connect over dessert. One idea to provide food would be for the church or host to provide the main dishes and ask parents to provide a side dish or dessert. Lead a few structured pool games for fun and group building like “Sharks and Minnows.” Instructions are available at wikihow.com/Play-Sharks-and-Minnows.
- **Scavenger Hunt**—If you have a safe walkable area in your town, community scavenger hunts are great for youth to work together creatively. Be sure to place at least two adults (preferably youth advisors for the school year) in each scavenger hunt group. You can form groups anyway you like; one suggestion is for a younger youth team and older youth team. A way to include parents in this activity is to have a “parent only” team so they can get to know each other better too. For more ideas online, go to pinterest.com/cat6745/scavenger-hunt-ideas/.
- **Low/High Ropes Course**—Many local camps offer facilitators to lead groups through a series of team-building exercises on low and/or high ropes courses. Low ropes offer challenges and intentional team-building activities. High ropes offer continued challenges for individuals as the youth group supports and cheers them on while experiencing these challenges alongside one another. It’s a great way to work together and connect this experience to how they will become a team within the youth group over the coming school year.

*If your youth group is too big to fit into one home, you can do two tracks by dividing the youth group and then come together for dessert at the same location, which could be a home or a park.

- **Activity Parks**—There are some recreational places that are classic fun for all ages. Often activity parks provide party packages including dinner, drinks, and recreational activities such as putt-putt golf, go-karts, bowling, or bumper boats. Your group might also visit a theme park if you live close to one.

New Ideas

- **5K for Charity**—5K walks/runs with cool themes are popping up all over the place and are often raising money for charities. See if there are any in your area during the time frame of your kick-off and go walk/run as a youth group. Some 5Ks have inflatables interspersed, some have zombies chasing you, and some spray you with color paint. Another idea is to pick a 5K that has a charity that connects closely to your youth group: for example, a pediatric cancer center or a local animal shelter. It's healthy, fun, and allows youth to give back!
- **Escape Room**—Many areas now have a new activity called an "Escape Room." This activity has your group locked in a room with a series of puzzles or problems to solve in a set time limit to escape the room. This is a fun way to have the group work together! Most venues cap the group size around 12 people. If your group is larger, you might need to have two sessions, starting one group with food or dessert before doing the Escape Room and then switch. However, many places have several rooms available and can have multiple groups going at one time.
- **Cooking Competition**—A fun way to have your youth work together is a cooking competition. Television shows like *Cupcake Wars*, *Chopped*, and *Iron Chef* might inspire a theme for your cooking competition. Two ideas would be a dessert competition or a pizza-making competition. Provide all the ingredients, cooking space, rules, and adults for each team. It will be important to use the food with care and eat it together at the end of the competition to limit food waste. Have parents, youth advisors, or other church member serve as a panel of judges with different categories of winners. One way to include parents is to have them participate together as a team to rival the youth.
- **Newer Activity Parks**—There are cool new recreational activity venues popping up that offer party packages including dinner, drinks, and recreational activities. Some examples to check for in your area are a trampoline park, Whirlyball, rock climbing gym, bubble soccer, or American Ninja Warrior Junior Obstacle Gym.



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You might also enjoy using the following Quicksheets that are related to back to school and youth group planning for the year:

Quicksheet #39—A Time to Celebrate: Back to School in the Church
https://www.presbyterianmission.org/?post_type=resources&cs=Quicksheet+%2339

Quicksheet #43—Around the Corner: 10 Places to Go with Young People
https://www.presbyterianmission.org/?post_type=resources&cs=Quicksheet+%2343

Quicksheet #47—Get Your Youth Planning/Youth Group with “Presby Land”
https://www.presbyterianmission.org/?post_type=resources&cs=Quicksheet+%2347

Quicksheet #49—New Year, New Opening Night Ideas
<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/quicksheet-49-new-year-new-opening-night-ideas/>

Quicksheet #53—Engaging with Youth People (Great for Leader Training)
https://www.presbyterianmission.org/?post_type=resources&cs=Quicksheet+%2353

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Ideas para eventos del regreso a clases

Siempre es divertido comenzar el nuevo año escolar y el año del grupo juvenil con un evento especial. Los beneficios de un evento inaugural pueden incluir:

- Darle la bienvenida a la clase más joven de su grupo.
- Reconectarse después de un verano de viaje y diversión.
- Incluir a los padres y madres durante una parte del evento para compartir una visión general de los planes del grupo juvenil para el próximo año y permitirles conectarse mutuamente.
- Presentar a los(as) nuevos(as) asesores(as) juveniles al grupo.
- Unir al grupo participando juntos(as) en un evento divertido intencional por un par de horas o más,

Las ideas mencionadas anteriormente pueden iniciar la sesión durante su horario normal de grupo juvenil, un tiempo especial durante el fin de semana o como parte de un seminario, retiro o campamento. Por lo general, una reunión de una noche da el tiempo necesario para formar nuevos grupos. Un par de horas juntos le proporciona a su grupo tiempo substancial para construir relaciones. Elija lo que es mejor para su grupo y el horario de su comunidad.

Los clásicos

Se denominan así porque tienen un historial positivo: año tras año hacen participar al grupo juvenil y encajan en una variedad de programas y comunidades.

- **Cena continua**—Invite a tres miembros de la iglesia a organizar aperitivos, una plato de fondo o postre. Si se debe caminar, las tres casas deben estar a una milla de cada una; Si tiene transporte, las casas deben estar a diez minutos de cada una. Si son casas de familias de jóvenes, a menudo los jóvenes que viven allí se sienten orgullosos de albergar al grupo, e incluir a una nueva familia juvenil es una excelente manera de conectarse con los nuevos participantes más jóvenes. Otra idea es hogares ir a donde no hayan jóvenes para que se conecten con otros miembros de la congregación. Planifique el evento por dos horas, incluyendo los viajes. Pase 30 minutos en las primeras dos casas para comer aperitivos y el plato de fondo, y planee pasar una hora en la tercera casa para disfrutar el postre. Invite a los padres y madres a unirse al grupo para el postre. Considere organizar un rápido juego Stop o de Tutti Frutti en la primera casa, simplemente coma en la segunda casa y jueguen algo divertido y/o comparta información sobre los planes para sus grupos juveniles el próximo año en la casa donde están los postres, y los padres se unen al grupo.*
- **Fiesta en la piscina**—Encuentre un padre o madre joven, un miembro de la iglesia o una piscina pública local que tenga opción de alquilar un local, y organice una fiesta de grupo con comida al aire libre. Invite a los padres y madres a participar en la diversión durante los últimos 30 minutos del evento para que los jóvenes tengan su propio espacio durante la mayor parte del evento, pero que los padres y madres pueden volver a conectarse con ellos(ellas) durante el postre. Una idea para proporcionar alimentos sería que la iglesia o el anfitrión proporcionen los platos principales y pidan a los padres y madres que proporcionen un plato o postre. Dirija algunos juegos para divertirse y fomentar las relaciones, como el juego del lobo. Las instrucciones están disponibles en [https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_lobo_\(juego\)](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_lobo_(juego)).
- **Búsqueda del tesoro**—Si tiene un área segura para caminar en su ciudad, la búsqueda del tesoro es ideal para que los(as) jóvenes trabajen juntos creativamente. Asegúrese de colocar al menos dos adultos (preferiblemente asesores juveniles del año escolar) en cada grupo. Puede formar grupos de varias formas según prefiera; una sugerencia es formar un equipo de jóvenes menores y uno de jóvenes mayores. Una forma de incluir a los padres y madres en esta actividad es tener un equipo solo para padres para que también puedan conocerse mejor. Para ver más ideas en línea, visite [pinterest.com/busquedadeltesoroparaninos](https://www.pinterest.com/busquedadeltesoroparaninos).

* Si su grupo de jóvenes es demasiado grande para que quepa en una casa, puede hacer dos grupos de jóvenes para intercalar las casas y luego reunirse para el postre en el mismo lugar, que podría ser otra casa o un parque.

- **Circuitos de sogas**—Muchos campamentos locales ofrecen facilitadores para liderar grupos mediante una serie de ejercicios de trabajo en equipo en circuitos de sogas. Las sogas bajas ofrecen desafíos y actividades intencionales para formar equipos. Las altas ofrecen desafíos continuos para las personas, ya que el grupo de jóvenes apoya y anima al participante mientras experimentan estos desafíos juntos. Es una excelente manera de trabajar unidamente y conectar esta experiencia con la forma en que se convertirán en un equipo dentro del grupo de jóvenes a lo largo del año escolar.
- **Parques recreacionales**—Hay algunos lugares recreativos que son divertidos para todas las edades. A menudo, los parques recreacionales ofrecen paquetes de fiestas que incluyen cena, bebidas y actividades recreativas como golfito, go-karts, bolos o botes chocones. Su grupo también puede visitar un parque temático si vive cerca de uno.

Nuevas ideas

- **Carreras benéficas de 5K**—Están apareciendo caminatas/carreras de 5K con temas geniales por todos lados, y a menudo recaudan dinero para organizaciones benéficas. Vea si hay alguna en su área durante el tiempo de su programa juvenil y vayan a caminar/correr como grupo. Algunos 5K tienen inflables intercalados, algunos tienen zombis persiguiéndote y algunos te rocían con pintura de color. Otra idea es elegir un 5K auspiciada por una organización benéfica que se conecte estrechamente con su grupo de jóvenes: por ejemplo, un centro de cáncer pediátrico o un refugio local de animales. ¡Es saludable, divertido y permite que los jóvenes hagan algo por la comunidad!
- **Juegos de escape**—Muchas áreas ahora tienen una nueva actividad llamada *juegos de escape*. Esta actividad consiste en encerrar a su grupo en una habitación con una serie de acertijos o problemas para resolver dentro de un límite de tiempo establecido para escapar de la habitación. ¡Esta es una forma divertida de hacer que el grupo trabaje en conjunto! La mayoría de los lugares limitan el tamaño del grupo a alrededor de 12 personas. Si su grupo es más grande, es posible que necesite tener dos sesiones, intercalando el primer grupo con una comida o postre antes de ir a los juegos de escape y luego cambiar. Sin embargo, muchos lugares tienen varias salas disponibles y pueden tener varios grupos a la vez.
- **Concurso de cocina**—Una forma divertida de hacer que sus jóvenes trabajen juntos es a través de una competencia de cocina. Los programas de televisión como *Cupcake Wars*, *Chopped*, y *Iron Chef* podrían inspirar un tema para su competencia de cocina. Podría ser una competencia de postres o una competencia de pizzas. Proporcione todos los ingredientes, espacio de cocina, reglas y adultos para cada equipo. Será importante cocinar con cuidado y comer

juntos al final de la competencia para no desperdiciar los alimentos. Haga que los padres, madres, asesores juveniles u otro miembro de la iglesia sirvan como panel de jueces con diferentes categorías de ganadores. Una forma de incluir a los padres y madres es hacer que participen juntos como un equipo para competir con los jóvenes.

- **Otros tipos de parques**—Hay nuevos y divertidos lugares de actividades recreativas que ofrecen paquetes de fiestas que incluyen cena, bebidas y actividades recreativas. Algunos ejemplos para verificar en su área son un parque de trampolín, Whirlyball, gimnasio para escalar, fútbol de burbujas o gimnasio de obstáculos tipo Ninja Warrior.

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A Time to Celebrate Back to School in the Church

*“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.”
—Ecclesiastes 3:1*

Heading back to school each year marks a significant milestone in the lives of our youth. Whether it’s their first day of middle school, the year they will finally get their driver’s license, or the first day of their senior year, youth carry with them a sense of hope, expectation and, yes, a little (or a lot of) trepidation about the start of school.

The beginning of the school year carries with it a great deal of ritual. Whether it’s getting class schedules and locker assignments, shopping trips for the right outfit to wear on the first day, purchasing school supplies or saying good-bye to summer, youth understand the power of ritual. Ritual is important and can be a grounding force in the midst of so much uncertainty.

Ultimately what our youth are yearning for is a place to belong, a place that is certain and sure amid the shifting (and sometimes sinking) sand of adolescence. The church can and does provide a place such as this when the youth know that the church understands where they are and what they’re experiencing.

With all of this in mind, here are some ways your church can help youth acknowledge and celebrate their “back to school” experiences:

Worship together (with the entire congregation or with a youth group).

On the Sunday evening before school starts, make time to worship together. Whether you’re worshipping within your larger community or during youth group, make time to sing and pray, hope and dream, share and experience the presence of God together as the school year begins. Use this time to allow youth to serve as leaders and servants to one another. Offer a safe space for youth to honestly share what they’re most excited about and what they fear most about the upcoming year. Share your own hopes and dreams for them as one who promises to walk beside them regardless of what may come.

You're praying for me?!?!?

Youth like to know that there are people who love them and who are praying for them. At the beginning of the school year, invite individuals in your congregation, adult Sunday school classes, Bible studies, Presbyterian Women's groups or Men's groups to pray for your youth. Give each group a list of names, grades, schools and, perhaps, a hope each youth has for the coming year. Encourage them to pray daily for the youth and to talk to them about the fact that they are in their prayers.

Take up a collection.

Invite the youth (and your congregation) to bring in commonly needed school supplies. The fact that going "back to school" can be expensive is not lost on youth. Help them gain a deeper sense of what it means to serve by helping others (just like them) who are in need. Empower your youth to organize the supply drive by spreading the word and deciding what group or organization they'd like to receive the donations. Then make the donation in honor of your youth.

Write a letter to yourself.

Just after school begins, while their hopes and dreams for the year are still fresh, ask your youth to write a letter to themselves, answering the following questions:

- At the end of the year, what do you hope you have accomplished?
- Where do you hope you will be?
- What will you have accomplished?

Their answers do not need to be unattainable, pie-in-the-sky aspirations. Instead, encourage youth to be honest about their feelings and aspirations. Give youth the option of whether or not you'll ever see what they write. In the end, they have the option of being the only one that reads it.

Midway through the year, around December, mail the letters to your youth, allowing them the opportunity to assess where they are and to adjust their behavior, if necessary. At the end of the year, give them the opportunity to name shortfalls and/or celebrate achievements. Your follow-through on asking where youth are with the things they wrote in these letters is far more important than your knowledge of the specifics of what they wrote. Ultimately, it shows that you care for them.

Bless their backpacks.

On the Sunday prior to the start of school, invite youth (and all of the children in your church) to bring their backpacks to worship to have them blessed. Their backpacks will follow them down school hallways all year long. Hopefully, they will remember that the prayers of their faith community follow them, too. Invite children and youth to bring their backpacks forward at some point during worship. Celebrate the achievements that are to come and honestly acknowledge the hardships that are to be faced as well.

Survival kit

Some days, starting school (or to keep going) is just hard. Acknowledge this with a survival kit that reminds your youth that they are cared for and loved. Your kit might include things like:

- Smarties: To boost your brain power.
- Sharpened pencil: Because you're sharp!
- Eraser: So that you remember that everyone makes mistakes . . . and that's okay.
- Hugs: Because some days . . . you just need one!
- Lollipop: To help you "lick" any obstacle that may come this year.
- Praying hands: To help you remember that your church family is praying for you. We love you.

Have a party!!

When all else fails . . . have a party!! Whether before or after school starts, get together to celebrate! Celebrate the year to come. Celebrate your membership in a group that will always be there regardless of the uncertainties. Include any, all, or none of the suggestions above to help as you form rituals and meaningful experiences that your youth will remember for years.

Unfortunately, it's not always a party . . .

In the midst of any celebration of the start of school, be sure to be aware of those that are not celebrating! For some of our youth, the beginning of school is not something to celebrate because it means reuniting with the voices that may tell them they are stupid and worthless. It means facing their fear of having no one they trust to sit and eat with at lunch. It may mean reuniting with the bully they've been fleeing from for years and don't know how to tell anyone.



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Always remember that for each of us, and especially for our youth, there is “a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose” (Ecclesiastes 3:4–6). This will be true of your youth, too. Just be there in the midst of it all!

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NOISE

A Youth Led Worship

Silent Meditation

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God” (Colossians 3:16).

This service is a celebration of the Book of Psalms. Many youth have a natural connection to Psalms and Proverbs because of their love of music and poetry. All the parts of the service are based on a different psalm. The order of worship is traditional with the content of each part of the service customized for this service. The proclamation of the word is a collection of favorite psalms presented in a variety of easy dramas. All the psalms are from the NRSV unless otherwise indicated.

The service opens with the youth calling everyone to worship with a drum circle. Use lots of homemade percussion instruments like paint buckets, coffee cans, and paper towel tubes filled with dried beans; and use them with traditional instruments like tambourines, wood blocks, congas, and bongo drums. As people enter the worship space, invite them to select an instrument to use in the drum circle. Use a lead drummer on the congas to keep the beat and signal the group to start and stop.

Drum Circle

Call to Worship (from Psalm 95)

O come, let us sing to the LORD;

Let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation

Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving

Let us make a joyful noise to God with songs of praise!

Let us make a joyful noise!

Let us make a joyful noise to our LORD and Maker!

Opening Song

Glory to God, 637 “O Sing to the Lord”

Confession (based on Psalm 51)

Call to Confession

The psalmist writes that the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit and a broken, contrite heart is something God will never despise. Bring your broken hearts and contrite spirits to our loving God:

Prayer of Confession (unison)

Have mercy on me, O God, for I am a sinner. You know my transgressions. You know my weaknesses. You know my faults and failures. You know my mistakes. You know me, God, and yet you love me still. Remove my sin from me, I am guilty.

Create in me a clean heart, ready to love you and love my neighbor. Make my slate clean. Forgive me and love me; restore to me the joy of your salvation.

Assurance of Pardon

The knowledge that you forgive us is our joy! We open our lips and declare your praise for you have delivered us from our sin and made us new! Alleluia! Amen!

Sing

Gloria Patri

Prayer of Illumination (based on Psalm 119)

O LORD, your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Give us grace to receive your truth in faith and love, and strength to follow on the path you set before us; through Jesus Christ, amen.

First Reading: Second Chronicles 5:11-14

Now when the priests came out of the holy place (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, without regard to their divisions), all the levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, their sons and kindred, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, stood east of the altar with one hundred twenty priests who were trumpeters. It was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the LORD, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever," the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.

This is the Word of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

Anthem or Hymn

If you prefer to do a hymn instead of an anthem, a good option might be the praise song, “Better is One Day in Your Courts.” Its chorus is based on Psalm 84:10. Possible hymns from Glory to God that would be good congregational songs are:

- 626—“As the Deer” (Psalm 42)
- 802—“The King of Love My Shepherd Is” (Psalm 23)
- 679—“Let the Whole Creation Cry” (Psalm 148)
- 54—“Make a Joyful Noise to God” (Psalm 66)
- 37—“Let All Things Now Living” (Psalm 148)

Second Reading: Psalm 117

Praise the LORD, all you nations!

Extol him, all you peoples!

For great is his steadfast love toward us,

and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.

Praise the LORD!

The Word of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

Proclamation of the Word: Noises from the Psalter

As our proclamation of God’s Word for this service, six psalms will be presented in six different ways. Listen anew to the ancient hymnbook of our faith.

Psalm 148

The idea for this piece comes from the “Fat Heads” used at basketball games. The youth work together to create their own posters that illustrate different aspects of creation named in the psalm. As the narrator reads the psalm, the youth hold up the corresponding posters. On the back of all the posters the phrase, “Praise the Lord!” is spelled out, and at the end of the psalm the posters are flipped over and all the youth shout, “Praise the Lord!”

Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights!

Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host!

Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars!

Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created.

He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps,

fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command!

Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!
 Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!
 Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth!
 Young men and women alike, old and young together!
 Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is
 above earth and heaven.
 He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of
 Israel who are close to him.
 Praise the LORD!

Psalm 47

This psalm is presented in the style of a Greek Chorus. Three different youth alternate the lines and all the other youth serve as the chorus. When the words are in bold capitals, the entire group says the words together. Anytime the word "clap" is said, all of the youth clap. After the word "Awesome," the chorus whispers it over and over to sound like an echoing crowd. Finally, one youth with a trumpet plays a fanfare when the phrase "sound of a trumpet" is said. This takes some practice, but the effect is really cool, especially the surprise of the trumpet.

Clap your hands, all you peoples! (*clap!*)
SHOUT to God with **LOUD** songs of **JOY!**
 For the LORD, the Most High, is **AWESOME**, (Awesome, Awesome, Awesome, etc.)
 a great king over all the earth.
 Clap your hands, all you peoples! (*clap!*)
 God subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet.
 He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves (**HE LOVES US!**)
 God has gone up with a **SHOUT**,
 the LORD with the sound of a trumpet (*trumpet sounds*) Sing praises to God,
SING PRAISES;
 Sing praises to our King, **SING PRAISES.**
 For God is **THE KING** of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm. **SING PRAISES!**
 Clap your hands, all you peoples (*clap!*)
 God is **KING** over the nations; God sits on his holy throne.
 The princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham.
 For the shields of the earth belong to God. **WHO IS HIGHLY EXALTED.**
 Clap your hands, all you peoples (*clap!*)

Psalm 19

This reading borrows a technique called a “scripture tableau” from Friends from the Groom. (A wonderful article, “Freeze Frame: Dramatic Scripture Telling Using Tableaux” in Reformed Worship explains this process.) You will need a chime or a triangle, a narrator, and a group of youth who serve as the actors in the tableaux. The psalm is broken down into shorter phrases that make good visual pictures and does not always follow the verse breaks. As the psalm is read in short phrases, the actors create positions that they freeze into and illustrate each phrase. Allow the actors to choose their positions, but feel free to make suggestions if the positions do not read well from the congregation. It is good to have someone standing at the back of the room looking at the tableaux to make sure that they make sense and are dramatic. The narrator begins by reading the following instructions:

Narrator: For our reading from Psalm 19, we will present a tableau. When you hear this sound (ring the chime or triangle), please close your eyes and listen as I read. When you hear the chime the second time, open your eyes and look at the tableau. I will ring the chime again and you will then close your eyes and wait for the chime to ring a second time to open them. The chime will tell you when to open and close your eyes as the psalm is presented. Now as I ring the chime, please close your eyes and listen for the word of God from Psalm 19.

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.
In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hid from its heat.
Let the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Psalm 100

This psalm is presented in what is called a “scripture pyramid.” The 10 youth participating stand in a pyramid shape: with four on the front row, three on the second, two on the third, and one on the fourth row. Make sure to match voice pitches on each row with the lowest voices together on the front row and the highest voice on the fourth. The psalm is broken down as shown below. Whenever there is one word on the line the single voice on row four reads it; whenever there are two words, the two voices on row three read it; and so on. Suggestion: place the youth on the fourth row on a box so that she/he stands above the youth in front of her/him.

Make
a joyful
noise to the Lord,
all the earth.

Worship
the Lord with gladness;
come
into his presence
with singing.

Know
that the Lord
is God.
It is he
that made
us
and we are his.

Enter
his gates with
thanksgiving
and his courts
with praise.

Give thanks
To him, bless his name
For the Lord
is good
his steadfast love
endures forever
and
his faithfulness
to all generations. (all voices)

Psalm 121 from *The Message*

This psalm is presented as a drama. Four youth speak the different lines and they should be encouraged to memorize their lines because voices 2–4 move as they speak. Voice 1 stands in the center with voices 2–4 standing around voice 1 in a half circle. As voices 2–4 say their lines, they move around voice 1 changing positions. After voices 2–4 read their last lines, they walk away leaving voice 1 alone to say the final four lines.

Voice 1: I look up to the mountains;
does my strength come from mountains?
No, my strength comes from God,
who made heaven, and earth, and mountains.

Voice 2: God won't let you stumble,
Voice 3: your Guardian God won't fall asleep.
Voice 4: Not on your life!
Voice 2: Israel's Guardian will never doze or sleep.

Voice 3: God's your Guardian,
Voice 4: right at your side to protect you—
Voice 2: Shielding you from sunstroke,
Voice 3: sheltering you from moonstroke.

Voice 4: God guards you from every evil,
Voice 2: he guards your very life.
Voice 3: God guards you when you leave and when you return,
Voice 4: God guards you now, he guards you always.

Voice 1: I look up to the mountains;
does my strength come from mountains?
No, my strength comes from God,
who made heaven, and earth, and mountains.

Psalm 150

This is a lot of fun! Youth enjoy playing the different instruments. One youth serves as a narrator and other youth are assigned to each instrument: trumpet, lute, harp, tambourine, strings, pipe, finger cymbals, and crash cymbals. If you do not have access to a lute or harp, use a guitar for the lute and an autoharp for the harp. For strings, use a couple of violins and a viola. If you have youth learning these instruments, it is an opportunity to share their gifts. For the pipe, use a penny whistle or a flute if you have a youth who is a flutist. You may be able to borrow crash cymbals from a local high school. As the psalm is read, the narrator pauses long enough for each instrument to be played.

Praise the LORD!
Praise God in his sanctuary;
 praise him in his mighty firmament!
Praise him for his mighty deeds;
 praise him according to his surpassing greatness!
Praise him with trumpet sound;
 praise him with lute and harp!
Praise him with tambourine and dance;
 praise him with strings and pipe!
Praise him with clanging cymbals;
 praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD!

Hymn

Glory to God, 327 “From All that Dwells Below the Sky” (Psalm 117)

Affirmation of Faith (based on Psalm 23)

Please remain standing as we affirm our faith using words based on Psalm 23.

Let us say together:

The Lord is our shepherd, we have everything we need from our God.

 God gives us rest in the green meadows and beside the cool waters;
You, O God, restore our souls.

 We are lead down right paths that bring honor to your name.
Even when we walk through dark and difficult valleys we will not fear;
For our God is with us,

 protecting, comforting, guarding and guiding every step we take.

You prepare a table before us
 in the presence of our enemies;

You lavish us with blessings to the point of overflowing.

We know with confidence that your goodness and mercy will follow us
 all the days of our lives,

And our eternity shall be in the house of the LORD forever and ever. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Our youth had so much fun using instruments in the drum circle and presentation of Psalm 150 that they decided it would be a different way to lead the Prayers of the People. As each instrument was played, people were allowed to speak their prayer concerns. Ask a few parents in advance to help encourage the congregation by speaking up loudly with their petitions. The instruments that we used were trumpet, tambourine, autoharp, congas, violin, and egg shakers, but any instruments could be used, even a single instrument repeated throughout the prayers. The youth leading the prayers gives instructions for the congregation. After the instructions are given, a trumpeter may play a short fanfare as a call to prayer.

Leader: As we prepare to lift up our prayers to God, please keep in mind all of the names on our Prayer List today.

In all the noise around us, how can God hear us? How can we hear God?
In the deep silence of this time and space, let us lift up our prayers to God.

When you hear the sound of one of the instruments, feel free to speak aloud the petitions on your hearts. Once the instrument stops playing, keep silent again.
Let us pray.

Trumpet sounds

Oh God, we know you are listening and that you can hear us over the noise around us, but listen, for your children are praying.

First instrument plays

Hear our prayers as we pray for the world . . . the powerful and powerless . . .
the hungry and angry . . . the places at war and the places living in peace.

Second instrument plays

Hear our prayers as we pray for the hurting and lost . . . the despairing . . .
the friendless . . . the downtrodden people.

Third instrument plays

Hear our prayers as we pray for the church . . . for unity and diversity . . . for leaders
and dreamers . . . for missions and services here and around the world.

Fourth instrument plays

Hear our prayers as we pray for the sick and dying . . . the hopeless and the grieving . . . the young and the old . . . the neighbors and strangers.

Final instrument plays or all the instruments play

Hear the prayers of your people, O God, for we are bold to pray as our Savior and your Son taught us saying together:

“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

Call to Offering (Psalm 37)

Hear the words of the Psalmist: “The righteous are generous and keep giving.” May we be generous and share our gifts of lives and labors to our God. Let us receive our tithes and offerings.

Offertory

If possible, have the offertory provided by a youth who is proficient at playing the piano. However, if you have youth who are learning a variety of musical instruments or who are gifted singers, present their musical talents during the offertory.

Doxology: Prayer of Thanksgiving (from Psalm 138)

Let us give thanks to the LORD with our whole hearts for great are the works of the LORD. He provides for us and the works of his hands are faithful and just. We offer to God the gifts of our very selves and dedicate them to the use of the Kingdom. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

Closing Hymn

Glory to God, 364 “Lift Up the Gates Eternal” (Psalm 24)

This hymn is a lot of fun and is based on a folk song that is easy to dance to. Work with the church pianist to increase the tempo after the refrain so that by the end of the song, folks are singing and dancing to a quick rhythm.

Charge & Benediction (from Psalm 67)

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us.
Let the peoples, praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.
And all of God's people said: AMEN!

Response to the Benediction: "Revolution"

It is our group's tradition to end each Youth Sunday with an energizer. The favorite of the group is "Revolution" by Kirk Franklin. Instructions can be found in Holy Motion. Although this resource is now out of print, there are videos of "Revolution" being led on YouTube.

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Called to Serve

Ideas for Commissioning, Equipping and Nurturing Your Youth Workers

Among the questions asked of ruling and teaching elders when they are ordained and installed is this:

*Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?
(W-4.4003)*

It is a question I think all of the leaders in our churches should be willing to answer with a resounding, “We will!” The call to serve can seem daunting and overwhelming if leaders are not adequately prepared for the task at hand. Commissioning youth workers who can and will serve with the qualities of energy, intelligence, imagination and love requires more than a simple liturgy in worship. Below are ideas to help you nurture and support leaders and youth workers who have a heart and a passion for working with tweens, youth and their families.

Affirmation

It seems simple, but a word of thanks should never be underestimated. Take the time to celebrate your youth workers, to lift up and affirm their gifts for ministry and to acknowledge a job well done. Affirmation can go a long way in the effort to build and sustain energy for a task that can at times feel discouraging and unrewarding.

Covenant

Our faith is based on covenantal relationships. “I will make an everlasting covenant with them,” says the Lord. Covenants are promises that aid in the establishment of expectations and boundaries. By accepting the role of youth worker, your volunteers will be entering into covenants with the staff and church leadership, with parents of your youth and with the youth themselves.

Devotion

Encourage your youth workers to be diligent in their own personal devotion. Nothing can sap energy, imagination and love quicker than a tank that is empty. Make scripture reading and prayer a part of your covenant with your leaders. Make it, too, a part of your preparation for each week’s activities. As your leaders pray individually and together, they will grow in their relationship with God and in their relationships with each other, giving them a solid foundation for teaching and guiding youth.

Equip

The information, skills and resources that youth workers will need to participate in this journey do not always come innately. Prior to the beginning of the school year, set aside time to get away for a retreat. A retreat should provide time for:

- Worship and prayer
- Getting to know other leaders
- Reviewing job descriptions and roles
- Sharing of information and resources that will be helpful to their role. Ideas include, but are certainly not limited to:
 - Appropriate policies and guidelines (Child Protection, Safe Sanctuaries, etc.)
 - Developmental characteristics and stages of tweens and adolescents
 - Do's and don'ts
 - Tips on leading discussions
 - Tips on leading recreation
 - Practice leading discussions and recreation
- Plans for the upcoming year
- Fellowship and relaxation

Give Thanks

Whether it is a small token they can keep in their pocket, wallet or purse or something larger that can be hung in their home or office, give your youth workers a gift that expresses your appreciation for them and the job that they will do. The gift will also serve as a reminder of the covenant into which they have entered.

Worship

Corporate worship is also vital for maintaining one's energy, imagination and love. Worship is the appropriate place to acknowledge the covenants that have been made between the youth worker, the church, the parents and the youth. Below is a liturgy that can be used in a worship setting to commission your youth workers.

Liturgy for Commissioning Youth Workers

Pastor or Director of Youth Ministry:

Scripture tells us, “The gifts that Christ gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and some teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, of building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the son of God” (Ephesians 4:11–13a). Today we gather to acknowledge, to thank and to commission those who have been called to guide, to teach and to nurture the youth of this congregation.

Congregation:

During the celebration of baptism, we promise and pledge our support to love, guide, and nurture all in our midst. One of the ways that we do that is to support, encourage and uplift leaders who will walk alongside our children and our youth.

God has called you to serve as youth workers, leaders and teachers, to walk alongside the youth of this congregation offering them your energy, your intelligence, your imagination and your love.

Youth:

We give thanks for the love and support we have known here. We continue to need people willing to lead us, who love us, support us and guide us. People who understand that being a teenager can be difficult. People who understand where we are; why we ask so many questions and who are willing to help us wrestle with questions, doubts and wonder.

Youth Workers and Teachers:

We are grateful for the trust that you instill in us. We promise to love, nurture, honor, support and encourage the children and youth in our care. We promise to approach the task before us with energy, with intelligence, with imagination and with love. We promise to walk with the youth of this congregation as they question, doubt, wonder, hope and live into their calling as children of God.



Quicksheets

Fast and Fabulous Ideas for Youth Ministry

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Congregation and Youth:

We have heard your promises and commitment to us. We promise to support you, to pray for you and to encourage you as you heed God's calling for your life.

Pastor or Director of Youth Ministry:

As you accept your role as youth leaders within this congregation, may you know and feel the prayers, support and love that embrace you. May you engage our youth with energy, intelligence, imagination and love. May you know God's love and approval as you grow in faith and hope and love each day.

Writer: Carrie Bower
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ByFaith— A Youth Led Worship Service Lectionary Text—August 18, 2013 Proper 15

It has been said that the opposite of faith is not doubt but certainty. Faith, the author of Hebrews tells us, “is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (11:1). It is anything but certain. Did the Israelites step out into the Red Sea, certain that they would feel dry land beneath their toes? Did the Israelite army march around the walls of Jericho, certain that they would come tumbling down? Did Rahab, a woman ignored and abused by much of society, welcome Israelite spies into her midst, certain that her life would be spared when they left? Perhaps, but not likely.

For youth, there is very little that is certain. Each day brings with it indecision and ambiguity. As you prepare for worship together, help your youth to name the ways that they live each day “*by faith*,” leaving space for doubt and for questions. For it is in this wrestling that we are all blessed by God and come to understand more fully the people we were created to be.

Call to Worship

One: *By faith*, we trust that we were created in the image of God.

Many: *By faith*, we hope and dream and make plans.

One: *By faith*, we face our fears and insecurities.

Many: *By faith*, we till the soil of our lives and plant seeds of love.

One: *By faith*, we follow where God leads.

Many: *By faith*, we trust that God is present in our midst.

All: *By faith*, we gather in this place to worship God together.

Call to Confession

Faith, the author of Hebrews tells us, “is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (11:1). It is *by faith* that we are able to confess our sins before God and each other. It is *by faith* that we trust in God’s love, mercy and forgiveness. Let us pray.

Prayer of Confession

Almighty God,

We are not always people who live by faith. We know that we were created in your image, but we treat ourselves and each other in ways that do not honor your presence within us. We know your laws and your commandments, but we choose to disobey you and to act in ways that harm our neighbors. We hear your call to reach out to those most in need, but instead we turn our backs on them and on you. Forgive us, O God, and help us day by day to become more faithful followers and the people you created us to be. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

One: What we have hoped for is true. What we cannot see has been made known. God's forgiveness is certain and sure. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

All: Thanks be to God!

Prayer of Illumination

God of Infinite Wisdom,

You have been faithful to your people throughout time. Calm our minds. Open our ears and our hearts this day that we might still hear of your faithfulness. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 11:29–12:2

Speaker #1: *By faith* the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned.

Speaker #2: *By faith* the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days.

Speaker #3: *By faith* Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

Speaker #4: And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, or David and Samuel and the prophets—who through *faith* conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

Speaker #1: Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented — of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in caves and holes in the ground.

Speaker #2: Yet all these, though they were commended for their *faith*, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

Speaker #3: Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Music Suggestions

Clouds by Zach Sobiech

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDC97j6lfyc>

Days of Elijah by Robin Mark

I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me

Presbyterian Hymnal #369

Lord, When I Came Into This Life

Presbyterian Hymnal #522

Here I Am, Lord

Presbyterian Hymnal #525

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