

CRASH COURSES *in* YOUTH MINISTRY **ADMINISTRATION**

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UMCyoungpeople.org



DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES
The United Methodist Church

A crash course (in training or education) condenses lots of practical material so that you can read and understand it quickly. A crash course is not where we strap you behind the wheel of a youth ministry bus, point you downhill towards a target and say, “*Hope you don’t crash!*” as you hit every bump possible on the road ahead.

Each of these crash courses in youth ministry are loaded with practical tips and basic wisdom that you can read today and put in to practice tomorrow. If you are a part-time or no-time (amazing volunteer!) youth worker, these crash courses are especially for you. (They’re also great for anyone leading a youth ministry. Just saying.)

Additional crash courses are available at:

UMCyoungpeople.org/CrashCourses

Further training for a variety of leadership roles in ministry is available in the e-learning section of Discipleship Ministries’ store at: store.UMCdiscipleship.org/product-category/elearning

INTRODUCTION

MUCH LIKE THAT JUNIOR HIGH STUDENT WITH THE BOTTOMLESS STOMACH, YOUTH MINISTRY IS THE KIND OF CALLING THAT WILL EAT UP AS MUCH TIME AND ENERGY AS YOU ALLOW IT TO.

Coincidentally, it will also impress and possibly disgust your friends as well. Effective administration will allow you to focus on the parts of youth ministry that you do best. It will also provide you with systems and processes to save you time, increase your ability to build meaningful relationships, and expand the reach of youth ministry in your church and community. So, thank you for investing the time it will take you to get through this short guide. We know time is not easy to come by in today's busy youth ministry world.

The best piece of advice we can give is right here: Find what works for you organizationally and keep improving on it. Adding organization to the things you already do well will only increase how much you enjoy leading ministry. Once you go through this resource, if any of it seems overwhelming, just start with the one thing that makes the most sense to you. Do that one thing well, watch for the difference it makes, and then decide if you want to add in some of the other excellent suggestions we offer!



01 CALENDARS: SHARING (YOUR PLANS) IS CARING

CALENDARING IS AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF YOUTH MINISTRY.

It allows you to make effective plans, and it helps families and youth make space in their schedules to be as active as possible. Use tools like a virtual calendar (Google Calendar, being one example) that enable youth and parents to subscribe; publish your calendar in church newsletters or emails; make it available on your youth social media accounts or website if you maintain those. Also, have a few printed calendars around your physical space, or use a display. Having your calendar public and available in multiple media will limit (but sadly, not eliminate) calendar questions from your students and their very busy parents.

Once you set your calendar, do your level best to deliver on the activities you promise. By planning far enough in advance (to know how far in advance, keep reading you slacker!), you can budget time and money, recruit volunteers, plan travel, and collect items to have on hand. If some of your calendared events require sign ups and registration, ensure that deadlines are obvious. When you set a deadline, remember to reserve that time on your own personal calendar, because many folks wait until the due date to get payments and registration forms in.



Get Ahead & Get Out of the Way

It may seem overwhelming at first, but there is tremendous value in being able to calendar at least twelve months out from your current situation. Why? There will be some major items on a year-long calendar; and knowing what is coming will help you plan effectively. Additionally, knowing the costs associated with your ministry plan will build good will with finance or stewardship committees at your church. It will also help you to build scopes and sequences for any teaching series or progressions through an intentional discipleship system. If you plan a twelve-month calendar, you can then break it into sections of six months, three months, one month, and “week-of” units. Within each of those units, you can put energy toward planning and preparation so that you aren’t scrambling the day of an event or lesson to pull things together. Planning this far ahead also frees you to recruit others to share the load of ministry. There may be activities that you are not excited about or gifted for, but there are youth and adult volunteers who will jump in when you can give a clear invitation to serve!

If you’ve never calendared out that far before, it can feel a bit intimidating, so you can build up to that date range slowly. Then, once you’re in the habit of creating and keeping calendars, you’ll find yourself discovering the value of rhythmic (or seasonal) planning as you go. One way to get ahead and create a twelve-month calendar is to schedule yourself (or your leadership team) planning retreats. These retreats could just be a

day or perhaps even several hours. However much time you dedicate to them, they need to be reserved on your personal calendar as uninterrupted planning time. Put away distractions and focus on the dates ahead of you.

Another way to break calendaring down into manageable parts is to split planning into “Detailed” and “Vision/Skeleton” buckets. Detailed planning involves taking the entire event (a class, worship, retreat, trip, etc.) and figuring out the people power, resources, budgets, communication strategies, and who will take on what responsibilities to help an event be successful. The “Visioning” or “Skeleton” planning process involves brainstorming ideas, determining why those ideas make sense in the context of your ministry, selecting dates, and generating buy-in from stakeholders (people who care about youth ministry or the event itself...not people who walk around holding stakes ready to pounce on vampires). In each process, you start a to-do list and track your progress.

Always ensure that you start with your “why”; this allows you to plan with the end in mind and ensures you have an answer for why the resources you put toward an event or activity are valuable for the faith formation of young people at your church.

Planning Retreat Model

Know your church’s calendar so you can shift planning retreat months to the months that are not as busy. If you are serving in a church that schedules out themes

and congregation-wide activities, use those plans as a source of ideas and a natural way to connect to themes. Here is an example of a flow that has worked for many youth leaders.

September:

- Detailed Planning for January, February, March, April, and May of the coming year.
- Vision/Skeleton Planning for June, July, and August

January:

- Detailed Planning for June, July, and August
- Vision/Skeleton Planning for September, October, November, and December

May or June:

- Detailed Planning for September, October, November, and December
- Vision/Skeleton Planning for January, February, March, April, and May

Final Word on Calendars

Consider the layers of busyness in your church, community, family, and student calendars as you create a schedule for your ministry. People have a better chance of showing up to things when you schedule things at dates and times that people can attend as easily as possible.

Some layers of busyness to be aware of in your planning:

- Larger church and calendar holidays
- School and community calendars and celebrations, including breaks, first and last days of school, holidays, and so on
- Regular church programming
- Key church events that include youth
- Youth traditions
- Regular weekly programming
- Connectional calendars (district, annual conference, or general church events that make sense for your church to be active in)

02 FORMS & RECORDS: DIGITAL OR PAPER, SIMPLY MUST-HAVES

Attendance

DO IT! Use the system your church has in place, if it has one. If there isn't a great attendance database, keep a simple spreadsheet of who shows up and when. Have sign in/out sheets at your gatherings and get that information into a database or spreadsheet. Then, once every one to three months, you can look at attendance patterns. If you see an individual has been dropped off the attendance sheet, you can check in with that person to see what's changed and invite him/her back to events or learning series you think he/she might like in the near future. If you see regular attendees, perhaps invite them for a conversation about what they are getting out of their participation and decide if they might be right to step into some leadership roles or expand their church experiences. Include participants and volunteers in your counts. Keep these records on hand for at least two to three years, so that you can do some date-by-date comparisons and have numbers to share with church leadership if there are ever questions about attendance trends, growth, or budgets related to your ministry.

Background Checks

Safe Sanctuaries guidelines recommend adult volunteers and church staff undergo a background check before



they begin working with vulnerable age groups like children and youth. That background check should be no older than three years, and it should include criminal items that get to the county level if possible. Your church should have a background check form that a volunteer completes; then the church can run the background check and keep the results in a safe and secure file that can be accessed by church staff or an administrator. A great practice is to update abuse prevention and risk prevention training annually; as part of preparing those trainings, track who among your volunteer team needs to update their background checks. Support resources can be found at UMCdiscipleship.org.

Medical & Insurance Forms

The information required on medical and release forms varies state by state, so check local guidance. Some forms may need to be notarized. Helpful items to include on these forms include:

- Legal name
- Address and contact information
- Emergency (parental) contact information
- Allergies and dietary restrictions
- Current medications
- Medical, dental, or other supplemental insurance policies
- Preferred (current) doctors or hospitals
- Photo or video release language

When hosting onsite ministry activities, have these forms available, but in a safe and secure location. Because these forms contain sensitive information, it is important to keep them out of public reach. When hosting offsite ministry activities, have copies of forms for attendees available, either in-print or digitally at all times. These forms should be updated annually and can be a great thing to include when moving youth up a grade in your attendance database, during back-to-school kickoffs, or before large events like a mission trip or retreat.

Outreach & Interests

Since you have a database or spreadsheet to track attendance (a poor paraphrase of Proverbs 6:6 would tell you to see the first item in this section, you slacker!), use that to track additional items as well. Set reminders for birthdays and send cards or notes. Keep records of students' interests, including what they do at church, even if it is not specifically "youth ministry." Keep track of interests outside of church, school clubs, teams, performance groups, and so on. You can then attend events (or, even better, recruit volunteers to attend!) that youth are participating in outside of church to show them and their family support.

Conversation Records

It is important for you and your volunteers to keep track of times that adult leaders have been in conversation with youth, especially when the

conversations feature sensitive topics, or if any kind of conflict arises. If communicating through social media, encourage volunteers and ministry leaders to use official church accounts that have multiple administrators. Save conversation records if possible. If a sensitive topic, conflict, or reach for help (youth in danger of harming self or others) arises, have an action plan in place that notifies your senior pastor; keep records of the conversation. Action plans like these may be addressed by youth church's Safe Sanctuaries policies and protocols. If immediate harm is a potential consequence of the conversation, follow local reporting laws.

03 BUDGETS: KNOW WHAT YOU'RE WORKING WITH

Expense & Income Tracking

If you are fortunate enough to be serving in a church that allocates budget to youth ministries, keep track of what is spent and what comes in. In business terms, this would be called a simple “profit and loss” document, where you can show line by line, how and when money was spent in addition to income from fundraisers, registrations, and so on. Accurate tracking with receipts is also important if your church asks you to use personal funds for ministry purposes and then be reimbursed by the church. If you do this on an event-by-event basis, this can help you understand exactly how much certain experiences like retreats and trips cost. Make sure that your records are easy to read and simple to understand, even for someone outside your ministry. This can be done in a spreadsheet or through a variety of budgeting apps. Your church’s finance committee may also be super helpful and provide or develop spreadsheets to help you track budgets.

Overall Budgets & Special Events

One way to make a case for a youth budget is to look at reports of what local school districts spend per student per academic year. This can create a baseline amount that youth ministers can request in support



of their ministries with young people. If the church does not provide an annual budget for youth ministry. (You still have to do some budgeting work; sorry!) If materials, resources, special youth activities, or offsite trips, and retreats require funds to happen, you have to budget. You can create specific budgets for single events and divide the overall cost by the number of participants that you expect. It is important for youth events to break even, or perhaps even make money that could be used to cover the costs of scholarships or could be donated to the church or other community organizations. A creative use of additional income could be to establish a fund that helps new participants in your ministry join their first retreat or mission trip cost-free!

Do your best to keep activities affordable for your context. Also consider establishing a scholarship fund so that cost is never a barrier to participation. Keep accurate track of payments; always have two unrelated people present when counting income or payments; and work with your church's finance staff or volunteer team to create accurate records. An effective combination of calendar and budget planning will help you create fundraisers that raise what is needed while not going back to regular donors or asking too much of the same group of people within your church.

Time Keeping

Time can be budgeted just like money. In fact, several states have begun to create legislation that clearly

defines how much work a part-time versus a full-time employee can put in and what benefits the employee should receive. Keep track of your paid hours and your volunteer hours, so that you can see where your time goes. If certain events or pieces of your responsibilities eat up more time than they should, this process can help identify where to shift your time to the most important aspects of your ministry. If possible, include planning and sabbath times as a part of your time keeping. Include required meetings and programming time as you track.

If you are a thirty-hour per week employee who is expected to lead twenty-five hours of programming, you have only five hours left for administration, planning, and other items that come up in the course of ministry - absolutely not sustainable in the long run! Discovering that kind of imbalance can provide useful information in discussions with the senior pastor or staff parish relations team (SPR) about finding more help or increasing your paid hours. It can also be helpful, if hours and pay cannot change, to go back to the “why” process in the calendar section and determine what you can let go of, or quit doing. Consider doing a thirty-day “time audit” for yourself every six months to see where your time goes. Several useful apps make this process simple.

04 MEETINGS & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

SPR & Church Councils

Ensure that you have an advocate on these committees who understands youth ministry. An advocate for you on staff-parish relations (SPR) is important, so cultivate relationships with those who serve on administrative teams and committees. Identify members of church committees who have youth eligible for or are active in your ministry. If there are none of these folks, consider asking the nominations committee to include some of these people the next time they are filling those committees. Connect with them regularly to share challenges, successes, and needs in your ministry. Invite members of church leadership committees to attend youth ministry events so they can experience your vision and ministry. Remember, these committees can rotate membership, so keep up with who is serving. Also, make sure to attend church committee meetings when required or requested.

Youth Leadership

Provide opportunities for youth to grow as leaders and take on responsibilities. Helping young people become load-bearing members of the church can have a profound experience on their discipleship. You can help identify initiatives and projects to take on, help



get youth named to church committees, and build a youth leadership team to share the load of planning and executing youth ministry in your context.

Youth leaders that you identify can also serve larger roles in the connectional United Methodist Church as part of districts, annual conferences, conference councils on youth ministries, and even more opportunities with the general church. Connect with your episcopal area leadership to learn about opportunities for youth to lead outside their local church and for materials that may help them develop as leaders within your local setting as well.

Equipping Others

Refer to our two [Crash Courses on Volunteers](#) for effective ways to recruit, train, and support volunteers as you equip them to lead youth ministry efforts. Many hands make light work, so sharing the burden of planning and leading youth ministry is an important strategy for long-term success.

Growing Yourself as a Leader

Effective youth ministry leaders find time for themselves to grow. These opportunities can come during planning efforts, sabbath times, or at slower times in the ministry calendar. Fully participate in feedback sessions with church leadership; invite feedback from youth, parents, volunteers, and church committee members related to your effectiveness as

a leader. Inviting feedback can be tough, so do some work to put yourself in the spirit of a lifelong learner. If this feels intimidating, ask someone that you know and trust out to coffee (or a milkshake or other excellent beverage) and ask them for three positive things about you as a leader and your ministry and three things that could be improved. The person that you invite to give feedback will feel honored at your invitation. If there are multiple people whom you trust for feedback, compare what each of them says as you reflect and find ways to grow. Find time to reflect and evaluate ministry activities, so that you can determine whether to include an activity on a future calendar.

With advocates on your side across church committees, ask for development days and for funds that can further your education and effectiveness as a ministry leader. Churches that really support youth ministers will support their need to have time to learn and grow. Have conversations with church leaders about how professional or ministerial development opportunities could be included in your work expectations or job description.

CONCLUSION

BY DEDICATING TIME TO ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION, YOU ACTUALLY FREE UP TIME AND ENERGY FOR YOURSELF TO DO THE PARTS OF MINISTRY THAT YOU FIND LIFE-GIVING.

Finally, remember that you are human; you are not an island. There is a social aspect to Christianity and to faith life. Organizing and planning effectively creates space for relationships to grow and flourish. It also creates space for you to be present and accountable with church leadership in ways that will be beneficial for you in the long run.



OTHER RESOURCES

- [Now That You're a YOUTH LEADER: How to Handle the Challenging Yet Rewarding First Years of Youth Ministry](#) by Jeremy Steele
- [Sustainable Youth Ministry](#) by Mark DeVries

