

Youth Ministry Curriculum Planning Guide

It happens each spring or summer. We've all been there. That moment where you face the daunting task of looking ahead to the following year and trying to come up with a plan for dates, topics, and events that will be covered all while balancing school and sport schedules, not to mention your own parish schedules. And the best part...you haven't even finished up with the current year! Planning for the upcoming year can be stressful. This document will hopefully provide a simple outline on some tips and methods in planning out the year for youth ministry.

***Disclaimer – This document contains general ideas and tips. Not everything contained here may be applicable to every parish setting.*

Key Elements to Consider when planning out Your Year

Every parish is different. Every group of teenagers is different. And every youth ministry leader and core team of adult volunteers is different. There are some key general elements that are a good idea to include when planning out the year. Here are a few good components to consider:

- **Catechetical** – Youth Ministry should include events that are catechetical in nature. Our primary call as evangelizers is to pass on the teachings of the Church through catechesis and evangelization. Catechesis in Youth Ministry however, is very unique compared how catechesis would take place in a classroom setting. Catechesis in Youth Ministry should be approached from a hands on experiential perspective where Church teaching is taught, but then applied and practiced. Examples of catechetical events in Youth Ministry are Youth Group Gatherings/Meetings that are catechetical in nature (ex. LifeTeen Life Nights and EDGE nights) and Bible Studies and can be incorporated into retreats, service projects and mission trips.
- **Social** – Youth Ministry should contain a strong and healthy social setting for teenagers. Christ's own ministry approach was very social in nature. He would meet people where they were at and engage them through things as simple as meals in order to build relationship and ultimately teach them. Examples of social events are game nights, movie nights, sports, bonfires, etc.
- **Current Issues** – Our everyday lives have an enormous effect on our spirituality. When ministering to youth, we cannot forget or ignore issues that they may face in their daily lives. It is important to offer opportunities for teenagers to discuss these issues and incorporate our faith into them. A good way to do this is to periodically incorporate issues into our typical youth group gatherings by offering gatherings focused on issues. Examples can include dating, social media, drugs and alcohol, same-sex marriage, etc.
- **Spiritual** – Probably the most important aspect of Youth Ministry is leading teenagers into a relationship with Christ through prayer and the sacraments. Spiritual elements should, to some degree, be a part of any you ministry event. However, it is a good idea to offer events that are primarily spiritual in nature. Examples can include Youth oriented Mass, Adoration, Praise and Worship, retreats, prayer groups, devotions (rosary, stations of the cross, etc.)
- **Service** – The gospel message should encourage us to go out and serve. Offering activities geared toward service gives teenagers a practical way to incorporate the faith. Examples can include service projects, mission trips, or visiting nursing homes or homeless shelters.

How do we put these things into Practice? What should a typical year for Youth Ministry look like?

Picking a Theme

A good starting place for planning your year is to pick out a simple theme that flows throughout everything that you do. Themes should be simple and should be one word or a short phrase. Accompanying the theme with a Bible verse is a good idea as well. Spend some time praying with your adult volunteers to come up with your theme.

Picking a time to meet with your Youth Group

When looking to map out the year, the first thing we typically do is look at dates for the upcoming year. When dealing with teenagers (and really anyone for that matter) consistency is the key. Start by picking a consistent time when your group will meet. This will depend a lot on your group and the time and resources you have. It could be once a week, every other week, twice a month, or once a month. Whatever the case, make sure it is consistent (ex. Every Sunday night or the first Wednesday night of the month)

Creating a focus for each semester

It's generally a good idea to break apart the year into 2 semesters (fall, spring). Come up with a specific focus each semester that corresponds to your theme. This focus should be centered on a specific area of Church teaching. A good guide for this is to use the USCCB's high school framework.

For example, let's say your theme for the year is "Encounter". You could focus your fall semester on the topic of Scripture (encountering God's Word) and you could focus your spring semester on the topic of Sacraments (encountering Jesus in the Sacraments).

Mapping out the year

After coming up with the theme and semester focus, now we begin to map out the year by seeing how the theme is unfolded throughout the year. Let's start with looking at our plan for our consistent youth group gatherings. When planning out these gatherings, it's important to offer a mix of some of the components listed above.

A good way to do this is to categorize your gatherings into 3 different categories: Curriculum Nights, Social Nights, and Issue Nights. This will be easier to do if meetings are more frequent. If they are less frequent, then you may need to combine 2 elements together. The next step would be to plan out the year without overloading one category all at once. For example, a mistake would be to offer all of the curriculum nights in a row without mixing in social nights.

Below is a simple outline as to what the year may look like based on 3 different settings: once a week, twice a month, once a month.

Outline for Once a Week Meetings (4 times per month)

Fall

September

- Social Night
- Curriculum Night
- Curriculum Night
- Issue Night

October

- Social Night
- Curriculum Night
- Curriculum Night
- Issue Night

November

- Social Night
- Curriculum Night
- Issue Night
- No Youth Group – Thanksgiving

December

- Curriculum Night
- Issue Night
- Social Night
- No Youth Group – Christmas Break

Spring

January

- No Youth Group – Christmas Break
- Social Night
- Curriculum Night
- Issue Night

February

- Curriculum Night
- Issue Night
- Social Night
- Curriculum Night

March

- Curriculum Night
- Issue Night
- Curriculum Night
- Social Night

April

- No Youth Group – Easter (date will vary from year to year)
- Curriculum Night
- Curriculum Night
- Social Night

May

- Issue Night
- Curriculum Night
- Social Night

Outline for Twice a Month Meetings

Fall

September

- Social Night
- Curriculum Night

October

- Issue Night
- Curriculum Night

November

- Social Night
- Curriculum Night

December

- Curriculum Night
- Social Night

Spring

January

- Social Night
- Curriculum Night

February

- Issue Night
- Curriculum Night

March

- Social Night
- Curriculum Night

April

- Curriculum Night
- Issue Night

May

- Curriculum Night
- Social Night

Outline for Once a Month Meetings

Fall

September

- Social Night

October

- Issue/Curriculum Night

November

- Issue/Curriculum Night

December

- Social/Curriculum Night

Spring

January

- Social/Curriculum Night

February

- Issue/Curriculum Night

March

- Social/Curriculum Night

April

- Issue/Curriculum Night

May

- Social Night

Choosing a topic for each gathering

Once you've mapped out the types of gatherings you will do, you can then go through and give each meeting a topic. Curriculum topics should correspond directly to an aspect of the semester focus. Issue nights can be about any issue but try and tie it in with the semester focus. Social nights do not necessarily need to tie in to the semester focus unless you are meeting once a month or less.

Below are the 3 outlines again with specific topics for the gatherings. We'll use example themes from before of "Encounter" and the example semesters of "Scripture and Sacraments" to outline what this may look like.

Outline for Once a Week Meetings (4 times per month)

Fall – *Scripture*

September

- Social Night – Kickoff party
- Curriculum Night – Intro to the Bible
- Curriculum Night – Creation/Adam and Eve and the Fall
- Issue Night – Dignity of the Human Person (incorporate Service Project)

October

- Social Night – Movie Night
- Curriculum Night – Old Testament prefiguring Christ
- Curriculum Night – Mary
- Issue Night – Chastity

November

- Social Night – Halloween Party
- Curriculum Night – Gospels/Life of Christ
- Issue Night – Social Media
- No Youth Group – Thanksgiving

December

- Curriculum Night – Pentecost/Holy Spirit
- Issue Night - Materialism
- Social Night – Christmas Party
- No Youth Group – Christmas Break

Spring - *Sacraments*

January

- No Youth Group – Christmas Break
- Social Night – Spring Kickoff
- Curriculum Night – Intro Sacraments
- Issue Night – Pro-life issues

February

- Curriculum Night – Baptism
- Issue Night – Christian Dating
- Social Night – Ice skating outing
- Curriculum Night – Eucharist

March

- Curriculum Night – Reconciliation/Sacraments of healing (offer Adoration/Reconciliation)
- Issue Night – Almsgiving (incorporate service project)
- Curriculum Night –
- Social Night – Game night

April

- No Youth Group – Easter (date will vary from year to year)
- Curriculum Night – Marriage
- Issue Night – same-sex marriage
- Social Night – bowling

May

- Curriculum Night - Confirmation
- Curriculum Night – Living out the Sacraments
- Social Night – end of year party

Outline for Twice a Month Meetings

Fall - *Scripture*

September

- Social Night - kickoff
- Curriculum Night – Intro to Scripture

October

- Issue Night - Dignity of the Human Person/Creation of mankind (incorporate Service Project)
- Curriculum Night – The Old Testament

November

- Social Night – Halloween party
- Curriculum Night – Gospels/Life of Christ

December

- Curriculum Night – Pentecost/Holy Spirit
- Social Night – Christmas Party

Outline for Once a Month Meetings

Fall – *Scripture*

September

- Social Night – Kickoff Party

October

- Issue/Curriculum Night – Creation/Dignity of the human person

November

- Curriculum Night – Old Testament

December

- Social/Curriculum Night – Coming of Christ/Christmas party

Spring - *Sacraments*

January

- Social Night – Spring Kickoff
- Curriculum Night – Intro to Sacraments

February

- Issue Night – Chastity/Dating
- Curriculum Night – Sacraments of Initiation

March

- Social Night – bowling
- Curriculum Night – Sacraments of healing (offer Adoration/Reconciliation)

April

- Curriculum Night – Marriage and Holy Orders
- Issue Night – same-sex marriage

May

- Curriculum Night – Living out the Sacraments
- Social Night – End of Year party

Spring

January

- Social/Curriculum Night – Kickoff/intro to Sacraments

February

- Curriculum Night – Sacraments of Initiation

March

- Curriculum Night – Sacraments of healing (offer adoration and reconciliation)

April

- Issue/Curriculum Night - Marriage/Holy Orders/Chastity

May

- Social Night – end of year party

Other Events and Ideas to Consider

Service Projects

Offering a few service projects throughout the year is a good idea. These can either be incorporated into some of your normal gatherings, or can be done separately. Ideas to consider would be a Thanksgiving meal for homeless, Christmas caroling at a nursing home, and making Valentine cards for nursing homes

Retreats

One very effective idea is offering a retreat for your youth group either once a year or once a semester. If you can, try to offer a weekend retreat away from the parish. Retreats are a great way to catechize and also to meet some of the social and relational needs of teenagers

Small Group Gatherings

If you are really ambitious and have the time and resources, these types of events can be really effective. Small group gatherings can include things such as Bible Studies, Discipleship Groups, or a weekly group that attends Adoration at the parish.