



## Activity Ideas for the Youth Group

by Melissa Woltmann

Planning a year's worth of activities for the youth of your church need not be a daunting task. Coming up with ideas is not as difficult as it sounds. Remember, however, simple is better!

First, you must **find a location** which will help you determine what you will be doing for that activity.

- **Make friends with your phone book OR internet directory for your area.**

No matter where we have been ministering, we have made the phone book or internet directory one of our special youth ministry resources. Even if you have "lived here all your life" there are new and exciting activities in your area. In some areas you may not have a putt putt center in town but a quick look on the internet may point out one that is available a short distance away. For the phone book, begin your search at the front in the newcomer section. This section is filled with information about parks, local ball teams, points of interest, sports facilities, etc. Many phone books will provide a breakdown of the local parks and sports centers enabling you to see the types of facilities and activities that are available in your area. Phone numbers are included aiding you in your search for securing shelters, cost of activities and hours of operation.

Once you have exhausted the newcomer section, flip to the yellow pages to begin your search for specific activities. Putt-putt, paintball, laser tag, skating, bowling - all these topics and more can be found in your yellow pages. An internet directory will help locate activities that are not available locally enabling you to expand out to other cities.

- **Contact the Chamber of Commerce.**

Go visit your local chamber of commerce. Introduce yourself and become acquainted with the employees there. The chamber's sole goal is to promote the local area and its businesses. You will also be able to find tourist information. The chamber of commerce will have brochures and pamphlets regarding activities and venues in your area which will aid you in your planning. You will find a wealth of information, some you will use and some you will not.

- **Ask others.**

Do not be afraid to ask your pastor, other youth pastors, Christian school administrators and even parents for suggestions. Limit asking the teens; you can set up a suggestion box to gather ideas of things they would like to do with the understanding that not all suggestions will be used.



- **Pick up local publications.**

Pay attention to local publications. Many have advertisements for activities and venues in your area. Local parent magazines are also excellent resources. We have been able to find several places for junior aged group activities through the advertisements in these publications.

- **Browse the internet.**

Checking the internet for games or venues for kids can be a daunting task. If you desire to set up a paintball activity, simply search "paintball center" + "your city/state". Remember to keep things simple; large scale activities should be used sparingly throughout the summer. Think through every idea for feasibility for your group and area.

Locating a place for an activity is the easy part. Now you must **determine the feasibility of your group using the venue.**

- Always **visit the venue before you begin planning.** You need to determine distance, parking, size of facility, the "wholesome factor", the "enjoyment factor", security, etc. Be sure to try out the facilities for yourself.
- If possible, **speak to the manager.** Introduce yourself. Explain what you would like to do. Make sure you have an approximate number for your group to receive the best possible pricing. Ask for special pricing or special hours. Many managers will work with youth groups.
- Be sure to obtain the **business card** of the manager.
- Be sure to **obtain any flyers with group pricing, hours, specials,** etc. for your files.
- If the locale will be suitable for your needs, **pre-schedule with the manager.** Call to set the date. Managers of youth oriented facilities know their business well. They will be able to help you in scheduling a date and time that will allow your group the most enjoyment. It is not out of the question to schedule two to three months early. The last thing you want to do is "just show up" with 20 or more teens only to find the venue overcrowded and understaffed.
- Ask if any special equipment is needed for the activity. Think through what you will be doing. What will the facility supply? Lunch? Canoes and paddles? Tubes? Changing facilities? Sports equipment? Grills? Ask if there is additional cost for these supplies and be sure to include it in your flyers for the young people and their parents.
- Ask if the facility has any special waivers that they will need to have signed by parents. Some activities are more physical, such as rafting, canoeing, indoor rock climbing, paintball, etc., and the facility requires parental/guardian permission for their own insurance purposes. A church permission slip will not be enough for these activities.



# Church Helps

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- Finally, if your church does not already have one, establish a church permission slip for participation in any activity that takes any child under the age of 18 off the church property. The permission slip needs to be specific including the name and address of the facility you will be going to. The permission slip should also include a medical release and “in case of emergency” information. Contact your insurance company or the Christian Law Association for more information regarding legal ramifications.

In addition to going somewhere, **activities can be planned right at the church.**

- **Sunday Night after Church (SNAC)** Activities of this nature are best if kept simple. An hour for the juniors and an hour and a half for the teens are really all that is needed. Food should be simple: boys bring a drink and chips, crackers, etc.; girls bring a drink and sweets. It is easy to adjust who brings what based on group dynamics by changing to even grades bring drink and chips; odd grades bring drink and sweets or some other set up that works for your group. Inside games are usually best, but when pre-planned, the young people can bring clothes to change into for outdoor or rougher games. Themes also are fun for activities like this. Ideas include March’s Mini Munchie Madness (all snacks in mini form), April’s EGG-stravaganza (games use plastic Easter eggs), or May’s Massive Mix Up (if you have a routine on who brings what, switch it up; all games change the rules). Be creative!
- **All Day Activities at the Church** Conduct these at least once during each summer; or you can set up a regular weekday throughout the summer. The times are usually 8 AM to 3:30 PM; parents can pick up or drop off as needed. Have available board games, books, or even videos for the teens to enjoy. Teens also might be allowed to bring rollerblades, skateboards or bikes (with all the proper safety equipment) to use on the church property which is usually not allowed. Make sure to order pizza or subs or have the teens bring their own lunches. Require the teens to remain in designated areas; no wandering. It is unstructured time, but it is chaperoned time so make sure there are a couple of adults that can be there with you throughout the day to be in the vicinity of the teens. You will be able to get to know the teens in a way you had not before. When we have conducted this type of activity we required one hour of “mandatory fun time” which in our situation we were able to play basketball, volleyball or softball. Occasionally, the teens actually asked for something to do around the church!
- **Activities at the Church** For either the juniors or the teens, activities at the church are very much enjoyed. Cook outs, all-you-can-eat pizza, sub sandwiches and the like are great for the food aspect. Game time should be very active. Include relays, play kick ball or softball but change the rules (boys kick/hit opposite, everyone run the bases 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, and home), or play capture the flag using water guns and balloons as weapons; the list could be endless. The key to participation during game time is to even the playing field. Many young people are not confident in their physical skills and do not want to be ridiculed for not being the sports superstar. By changing the rules so that everyone looks silly doing the same thing, including the adults, your



young people will be more comfortable participating. Yes, you will be accused of being nuts, but they already think that, so make it true!

If something simply did not work, make a note not to do that again. An interesting side note is that just because something did or did not work with one group of young people, does not mean that it will or will not work with another group of young people. The personality of a youth group changes every several years as teens graduate and others are promoted up. Youth group dynamics definitely change from location to location. You can try anything once... just be prepared to switch gears mid-activity if things don't seem to be going well.

Planning a year full of activities need not be a stressful endeavor. Sure, you may have some "hits" and some "misses". Make notes and keep a file. Pay attention to the teens weeks after an activity. An activity you think was a total failure just may have been a hit with your teens; they may even ask to repeat it. You must remember to keep it simple, do your homework on the location, and pre-plan well in advance.

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