



In almost every workshop I have ever led, the first questions had to do with topics and resources. Where do I find good resources that will keep youth involved? What resource should I use for confirmation (or for Sunday school)? In every workshop, I dealt with that question the same way: “We are not ready for that yet. You first have to know why you want resources. What is it that you want to do in Christian education with youth (either Sunday morning, Sunday evening, or any other setting) that requires resources?” This response frustrated a lot of groups, but it did focus on the real issue. You see, if you do not know where you want to go, any resource will get you there. So, you first have to have a road map, a game plan, a strategy for youth ministry. Then you have an idea of the kinds of resources you need to help you work out your game plan.



**Where do we find new approaches
and/or ideas for topics/resources?**

Start with your own game plan (master plan or road map): What is it that you want to do in youth ministry? What are key issues for you and your youth? What is it that you are looking for in a resource, or in a list of topics? When you have that game plan firmly in mind, you can begin looking for new ideas and approaches.

But why wait? Why not start off by looking for new ideas/approaches and build your plan around them? Because that strategy begins with a resource or an idea and not with the needs of your youth and the long-range strategies you have developed for meeting those needs. You may find a new idea on the Internet and rush it right into your youth program, only to discover that it does not come close to meeting the spiritual needs of your youth. Plus, there are not that many new ideas and/or approaches out there, so most of the ideas have been used in the history of Christian education. You can find some new ways to use old approaches/ideas, because technology and other equipment developments give you new tools. But the ideas are pretty much the same.

Now, having said all that, you still need some freshness in what you are doing. So, let's assume that you have a serious game plan and are not looking for a magic answer to all your problems. Where can you find some new approaches and ideas?

- Check out the Web for some helpful resources. See the list of websites in this book (pages 119–20) that other youth workers have found helpful.
- Take a new look at existing resources. Keep a library of resources from more than one publisher, and hang onto old copies of resources. Can you take a method from one resource and use it to teach content from a second resource? For example, Resource A has great content about a tough Bible passage, but its teaching-learning method is read and discuss. Resource B has incredibly shallow content for teaching a Bible passage, but the teaching-learning method is interactive, involves more than one way of learning (see Questions 22 and 94), and sounds as if it would be appealing to youth. This approach takes some serious work on your part, but the payoff is tremendous.
- Where do you find new topics for discussion, particularly in the areas of decision making and current issues? One place is daily newspapers or newsmagazines. Another is electronic resources, such as LinC (see www.ileadyouth.com, on page 120). Talk to youth to find out what national and international issues are engaging their attention. Talk with other youth leaders, both in your community and on the Web. All kinds of topics are floating around. Check out the ones that fit both the needs of your group and the game plan you have developed for Christian education with youth.



What makes a resource good?

Here is the answer everyone hates: It depends on what you want the resource to do. If you do not know what you want to do, or where you want to go, any resource will get you there (see Questions 20, 28, 30, 94, and 95). Once you know what you want to do, you can choose your resource accordingly.

Having said that, here are some general guidelines for what makes a resource good. A good resource

- has an inner integrity; that is, there is a coherence and plan about the resource. It has clear objectives and a clear plan for reaching those objectives.
- takes into account the various ways youth learn (see Questions 22 and 94).
- has clear, easily understood directions for leaders.
- offers the opportunity for at least some degree of in-depth probing of the topic and for dealing with related questions not covered by the session plan.
- fits your goals and objectives. This means that no single resource will be good for all groups and all situations. Rather, the definition of good depends on what you need for your own ministry. Fortunately for religious publishers, there are enough similar needs and game plans that developing resources can still be profitable.

The preceding list assumes a structured learning setting, such as Sunday school or a Bible study. Resources for fellowship groups should also offer much the same benefits, although in perhaps a less-structured form.



How do we choose resources that meet the needs of everyone?

Again, the answer is not popular, since it does not involve a magic wand and does involve some preparation and forethought on the part of your leadership team: No single resource is going to meet the needs of all the youth in your group all the time. So, what do you do?

First, be clear about what you perceive the needs of your youth to be. Where are they in their spiritual journeys? What foundational studies do they need to have a firm basis for their growth in faith? Where are their interests? What is their age level? What is their level of maturity?

Second, be aware that not all youth prefer to learn in the same way, so you will need different resources to meet their needs in learning preferences (see Question 94). If youth never have the opportunity to learn in the way that is most comfortable to them, they will begin to drop out. But if they recognize that, on a fairly regular basis (not necessarily every Sunday), they can learn in the way they most prefer, they will become more deeply involved. This is meeting youth needs on a serious level. So, look for resources that are tuned into using a variety of learning methods.

Look at resources to see which fit the needs of your youth. Which resources offer a variety of topics to involve youth in growth in faith? Which resources offer a variety of teaching-learning activities so that you can offer youth the chance to learn in the way they most prefer? Remember that not every activity, or even every session, will speak to all the ways in which youth prefer to learn. After all, people prefer to learn in a wide variety of ways.



How in-depth should we go in Bible study with youth?

Go as far as youth want to go. If they want to dig into historical background, geography, and social customs, help them find resources and turn them loose. (*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, and a good Bible atlas are the basic resources you need for this. You should be able to find all of them in your pastor's library, the church library, or the public library.) If you feel inadequate to deal with their questions and concerns, step right up and say so. Then tell them you will help them find the resources they need and will work with them to discover the answers. Plan for some kind of result from their study that they can show off. Maybe they can make a map of Abraham's journeys or a chronological table of the period from Moses to David. Or they could put together a newspaper that headlines the biblical story and has supporting columns that cover all the background information.

If the in-depth information your youth want has to do with the way the Bible applies to life, rather than to background, that is also good. You may still want to push them to do some work on biblical background so that they understand something about the social context in which a passage was written. As they talk about implications of a passage, also be sure they understand the context in the Bible. Taking a sentence or paragraph out of context can completely change the implications of its

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meaning. Again, if you feel out of your depth, say so and commit to working together on understanding a passage. Use commentaries, Bible handbooks, and other resources to help you think about the implications of a passage.



What topics should we avoid in dealing with youth?

Do not avoid any topic in which youth have a real interest. As you plan to deal with controversial topics, you need to be aware of possible parental and congregational reactions. Talk with the pastor and with key parents, and explain what you are going to be talking about and the context in which you will be doing it. One of the advantages of a long-range plan (see Questions 28 and 95) is that parents should already know the context in which learning for youth will be taking place. This gives them a sense of security when controversial topics come up; they have some assurance that you are not going off the deep end just to keep youth interested but will deal with controversial topics in a biblical and theological framework that fits within the stance of your denomination.



Topics about sexuality are often ignored by the church. How can we carefully and responsibly deal with them?

This question points up several key issues. First, the church often ignores this topic because we have difficulty in talking about human sexuality. Second, when we deal with sexuality, we need to do it carefully and responsibly, since the church has so much trouble talking about sexuality. Anytime there is a potential flashpoint in dealing with a topic, we need to be doubly careful and responsible about planning and presentation.

Having said that, how do we go about talking about sexuality? Begin by pulling together a planning team that includes, in some capacity, the pastor, the youth leaders, parents, and some youth. You want to build as broad a base of support as possible early in the planning. The planning team should outline purposes and goals for dealing with sexuality, possible topics, and potential resources in the community. You may need to push the planning team to include some topics that are more controversial, such as safe sex and homosexuality. Certainly, you want to push them to move beyond “Just say no” as a moral guideline. Values and decision making should be key elements in any programs on sexuality. Continue to check your goals against the Social Principles, which are in

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, so that you are sure you are working within parameters established by The United Methodist Church. (Or refer to similar guidelines for other denominations.)

What about resources? First, check denominational sources to see what kinds of print and video resources are offered for use in the local church. Then check with the conference youth director to see if there are trained teams in the conference who can offer special sexuality seminars in your local church. Are there potential leaders in your area, such as hospital training and outreach programs, social services, and so forth? Who are potential leaders for talking about values in sexuality, as well as decision making? What guides of resources are available to help those leaders prepare and lead sessions?

Then you will want your planning team to decide how to promote the sessions. Will they be advertised widely? Will you open the sessions to all youth in your community? How will you spread the word? How will you deal with church members who complain that the church should not be involved in that kind of teaching (or who want you to promote only simplistic responses to complex issues)?

Questions You Didn't Ask



What should I look for as I evaluate resources?

Resources convey both implicit and explicit messages. Some resources may appear appropriate on the surface, but you discover, as you look deeper, that the implicit messages are not consistent with the theology and values of your youth program and may actually contradict the explicit messages of the resource. As you evaluate resources, consider these things:

- What does this resource imply about the nature of God?
- What images of God are portrayed in this resource?
- How does this resource depict other cultures and races?
- Do the activities in this resource exclude people with disabilities from being able to participate?
- Does this resource reinforce ethnic- or gender-based stereotypes?
- Do the examples and activities assume that everyone comes from an upper-middle class economic bracket?
- How is the Bible used in this resource?

- Does this resource encourage youth to use in their own lives what they are learning?
- Are the suggested activities appropriate for the mental, social, and spiritual level of maturity of your youth?
- Do the suggested activities create a situation where there will be winners and losers?
- Do the suggested activities create a situation where a youth may feel put down for his or her ideas?

