

# Chapter

# 3

## Why Have a Youth Council?

### The Benefits of Having a Youth Council

A youth council is a way to share and teach responsibility and to increase involvement and relevance. Adult leaders may find it more expedient to do things without a youth council, but in the long run, a youth council will lead to a ministry by and with youth, rather than a ministry for youth.

A council on youth ministry strengthens youth ministry by:

- Involving others.
- Partnering youth with adults.
- Keeping the entire youth ministry in focus: study, service, fellowship, the arts, worship, outreach, sports, administration, and so forth.
- Developing youth leadership.
- Giving youth a voice in decisions.
- Providing a forum for new ideas.

### What Does a Youth Council Do?

A youth council's tasks are fluid, reflecting the times, needs, and understandings of the church. The following list is an overview of responsibilities:

- Evaluates the scope of youth ministry, making recommendations so that present and future needs of youth are addressed.
- Coordinates and schedules all youth events.
- Keeps the other youth informed.
- Reports to the church council (or equivalent body).
- Provides a forum for churchwide information that youth need.

- Works with the congregation's nominations and personnel committee to recommend youth members to other official groups. (Remember that youth may serve on all boards and committees except as trustees—the law requires trustees to be adults.)

## The Adult Role in a Youth Council

Youth leaders, instead of adult leaders, should be allowed to carry out the bulk of the duties. Initially this may not be an easy thing to do. If a council is new, it will take time for the youth to understand what is expected and to be able to fulfill the expectations. While they learn these things, be gentle with them. Support them in their successes; walk with them in their failures. In all cases ask this question with love, "What did you learn in this experience?" Let them answer for themselves. If adults quickly begin rescuing youth from the consequences of their actions or non-actions, little significant learning takes place. A youth council is an important way for youth to discover and to develop leadership abilities.

A well-functioning youth council takes extra time, greater attention to detail, advanced planning, and a commitment to follow through. In short, it takes organization. It is better not to have a youth council than to have one in which adults make all the decisions.

## Does a Small Church Need a Youth Council?

A benefit of smaller groups is ease of inclusion and movement. If you have few numbers, you may call together all youth and adult leaders to review ministries under the church youth umbrella once or twice each year. Procedures can be kept flexible. Responsibilities can be rotated and shared with ease. Coordination of youth events can be comfortably shared. Consider these steps:

- Meet with all youth and adults for a review of the big picture of youth ministry in the congregation.
- Establish a worship atmosphere and spend time inviting the presence of the Holy Spirit to the planning.
- Review or develop a vision statement: What is the purpose for having a youth ministry? Why are we doing this planning? What do we need to accomplish?
- Plan the annual calendar of responsibilities, ministry opportunities, and special events.

- Assign responsibilities for planning and follow-up.
- Establish when the next meeting will be.
- Acknowledge and celebrate God's hand in the work.
- Dismiss with prayer.

## What About Larger Churches?

Larger and more diverse youth ministries may choose to develop a more formal youth council to assure all parts of youth ministry are cared for. Consider these steps:

- Establish regular meeting times, monthly or quarterly.
- Determine who should serve on the council.
- Hold an annual planning retreat for the leadership. At this event the youth ministry vision statement is reviewed, affirmed, and embraced; the calendar is established; and assignments are made. Different general task areas such as missions, music, and worship can be set up. Or specific task groups can be established, such as the spring retreat task force, the mission trip task force, and the youth Sunday task force. A blend of both is typical.

## Who Serves on a Youth Council?

Membership on the council preferably should include at least two youth for every adult. Youth members may include:

- One or two representatives from Sunday school classes.
- One or two representatives from the junior high and the senior high youth group.
- A representative from each other youth ministry group (youth choir, Youth DISCIPLE Bible Study, Youth Covenant Discipleship Groups, and so forth).
- A few at-large members. These may be filled by youth from your church who are involved at the district, conference, jurisdictional, or national level.

Adult members should include as many of the following as possible, while keeping the ratio of two youth for each adult:

- Coordinator of youth ministry.
- Sunday school teacher.
- UMY adult leader.
- Representative from other church youth ministries.

- Representative from the church council or equivalent body.
- Parent.
- The pastor and/or the employed youth worker.

## Selecting Youth for the Youth Council and Making Other Decisions

It is important that every individual who wants to be involved in leadership has the opportunity to do so. How are individuals selected to participate in the leadership positions of a youth council? How are decisions made in the youth council? Review the following possibilities and select the model that works best for your situation.

### Voting

Any process involving elections needs to be handled carefully and thoughtfully, or you can easily end up with people elected for the wrong reasons. It is possible to have teens elected to positions because of popularity, rather than because of their abilities to lead effectively in a particular position. In any election there are winners and losers. For many teens losing an election can be damaging to self-esteem. Be careful if you use this method.

Voting works well for issues that need to be decided quickly, or when everyone's support is not necessary to implement the plan. For example, voting may be the most effective way to decide if you will have pizza or hot dogs at a youth event, but it may not be an effective way to decide if the youth will commit to serving on a regular basis at a homeless shelter.

### Discernment

Discernment puts decisions into a faith perspective before choices are made. Discernment brings focus to issues using a specifically Christian light. Taking time to quietly consider the council of the Holy Spirit inspires those involved to make wise and faithful responses. Discernment requires a certain level of faith maturity and an atmosphere of worship and prayer. It is a more faith-filled way to make decisions.

For discernment decision-making:

- Choose and maintain an attitude of worship.
- Meet in a worship setting.
- Open with centering songs or liturgies.
- Read relevant Scripture that calls for wisdom and maturity.

- Offer prayers for the same.
- Present the issues, one issue at a time. (Maintain a worshipful atmosphere.)
- Encourage questions of exploration or clarification.
- Distill the dialogue into a focused single question.
- Call for a five- or ten-minute time of silence for Godly reflection.
- Ask for insights gained. If there is no consensus, try once more.
- Seek creative responses to God's leading by blending or reshaping ideas until a sense of having met God's intent is reached.

The discernment model is particularly appropriate when dealing with important issues that need the support of the entire group.

### Invitation

Another model of establishing a leadership team is by invitation. There are two types:

- **Individually**

Calling people individually by name is the way Christ selected his disciples. Inviting people by name suggests several things: You know them; you recognize gifts in them; and you respect their ability to do something or to be effective in some meaningful way. This method requires a skilled leader who can see potential and who can help develop those God-given gifts, however latent they may be. Strive to find meaningful work for every youth who seeks an opportunity.

- **Collectively**

In this method, announce a meeting time and place for all those interested in leadership. Those who show up constitute your youth council. From there you can help them discern task groups for various areas or events, choose officers (if helpful), and more. Different groups may take on specific tasks such as the annual winter retreat, the summer high adventure trip, weekly devotions, monthly mission projects, or the Christmas pageant. It may be that the group senses God leading them to work on these as a team.

### Sign-Up

Create a sign-up board with descriptions of each office or team available. Invite people interested in serving in a leadership capacity or on a committee to sign up during a specific period of time. If a list contains only one name, that person is automatically placed in charge. If

several people sign up, members can meet together and discern their own leadership.

## Planning a Youth Council Meeting

The following guidelines will assist youth who are serving as leaders.

### Before the meeting:

1. Work with adult members to prepare an agenda, and have it available to hand out or to post on newsprint.
2. Clear all arrangements for a meeting place.
3. Gather resources that will help in the group's work (calendars, curriculum materials, *UMY HANDBOOK*, lists, and so forth).
4. Send reminder notices to those who are to attend.

### On the meeting day:

1. Check the meeting place for comfort and a good work setting, preferably chairs around a table.
2. See that necessary supplies are on hand, such as newsprint, marker, tape or tacks, and program materials.
3. Post the agenda.

### During the meeting:

1. Use the prepared agenda to guide the meeting.
2. Everyone in the leadership group has responsibility for keeping the work moving. Any member should be ready to ask:
  - Is the topic clearly defined (or the issue adequately explained) so we can understand what we're dealing with?
  - Do we have all the necessary facts before the group?
  - Have we had enough time to examine the facts?
  - Can we postpone action, or does some decision have to be made now?
  - What possible solutions are we considering?
  - What decisions have we reached on these matters?
  - Who has been assigned what responsibilities?
  - How can we speed up this process?
  - What questions must we answer before we can proceed to a decision?
  - How do we plan to evaluate the results of this decision?

3. If the meeting seems to be bogged down, check for difficulties:

- Are the goals clear?
- Are too few persons doing all the talking?
- Is there an unwillingness to work at the task?
- Are personal feelings getting in the way?
- Are there not enough facts?
- Are the issues confused and confusing?
- Is someone dominating?
- Are we getting off the subject?
- Is there a clear sense of direction?

Once difficulties have been identified, redirect the discussion, clarify issues, summarize previous discussion, and ask questions to get the meeting back on track.

4. Encourage follow-through by:

- Assigning responsibilities.
- Making specific appointments.
- Setting preparation deadlines.
- Clarifying how something is to be done.

5. Set times to check on progress.

6. Remember to say, "Thanks for a job well done."

7. Be ready for emergencies. The unexpected will happen. All of us "goof up" at times.

8. Evaluate what was done and how it was accomplished. What do we want to remember for next time?