

CHAPTER 10**Youth Fellowship Work**

One of the toughest issues in youth fellowship is how to group youth. Which youth should be a part of which group? How many youth fellowship groups? Each church will have to devise a plan for grouping for itself. For practical reasons, your church may want to echo the public school system in your area in its groupings pattern, as most of the youth who attend youth fellowship attend schools.

For the larger church, a pattern of grouping youth by grade level can be quite successful. Larger churches may have enough youth involved in fellowship to have *five* basic groups.

The first group is for those not yet in middle school or junior high but who have already begun puberty (see chapter 1). For these young people a weekly, ongoing youth fellowship may not be the most appropriate pattern. You may want a monthly meeting or a very intensive after-school program four or five days a week.

Some resource groups in youth ministry have already begun to produce materials to use with this particular group. Programming ought to emphasize activities and the building of relationships. The difference between boys and girls entering puberty is great, so leaders of these groups will be hard pressed to keep programs relevant, as the stage of physical and mental development can vary so greatly from individual to individual. It is important for these youngsters to be included in the youth ministry of the congregation. But it may not be appropriate to simply include them in whatever youth fellowship groups have been meeting. It may be more effective to form a separate group that can begin to develop not only its own program but its own tradition and identity as well.

Some of these youth fellowship groups for preteens who have started puberty meet during the week after school, as the crunch of school activities that occur in later years has not happened yet. Some churches have moved to an after-school "youth club," where the youth meet every day after school, usually Monday through Thursday. Some places have gone to a monthly meeting or a bimonthly meeting instead of a weekly time together. Still others have simply expanded their Sunday school to include youth fellowship activities for this age group. These congregations have recognized the need to expand their ministry with these "new youth."

The second grouping is what has traditionally been called "junior high" youth fellowship. Because schooling patterns have become focused on available classroom space and class size in each district, rather than on educational theory, there is no longer a consistent definition of who attends junior highs or even middle schools today. Instead any configuration that can match available classroom space with numbers of students in any particular grade is used and developed. This makes it difficult to find a consistent "junior high" grouping, as it changes from community to community and even year to year within communities. Nonetheless this is a valuable age/grade grouping. Usually this group includes those young people in grades seven

and eight, or ages twelve and thirteen. It may be better to keep classmates from school together rather than to keep strict age policies, as school is such a pervasive part of teen life. Classmates may share more in common, even if their respective ages are very different.

The traditional high school aged young person (grades nine to twelve) could form two different groups. The first group may focus on those entering high school (grades nine and ten)—the development of intimacy and identity, relationships with peers and parents, and the building of a really supportive community.

A fourth grouping is the second part of the "high school" group: those nearing completion of high school (grades eleven and twelve). Here the youth could begin to look at intimacy on a deeper level, saying good-bye to high school, separating from parents, the process of deciding a vocation and calling in life, and trying to develop a sense of what God wants each teen to do with his or her life, including college, career, and partner choices.

The last grouping would be for those who had graduated from high school or are older than eighteen and no longer in high school. In our society, once an individual has reached eighteen certain status and privileges are accorded him or her. Many are now working or going to colleges or to technical schools. These experiences are vastly different from high school. Yet these young people are still "youth" and need to be included in the youth ministry of a local congregation.

These groupings are suggestions for youth fellowship only, and not for all segments of your youth ministry. Sunday school classes usually parallel the school system, maintaining a consistent grade structure. Smaller churches, of course, often do not have separate classes for every grade. However, many larger churches need to have a strictly grade-level oriented Sunday school system. Other parts of the congregation's youth ministry may be able to include all the youth together, and others may need to find some other age grouping, such as over the age of sixteen for some athletic teams, or over thirteen for certain camps.

Smaller Churches

Many smaller churches have ignored groups one (the preteen) and five (post high school) and combined groups two through four. Usually this is done for one of two reasons: a lack of youth or a lack of adult workers with youth. While I sympathize with churches that have these problems, I encourage them to try to develop at least two separate groups. What normally happens in one large grouping is that individuals at either end of the spectrum feel the group is not for them and don't attend. In many places this means that once teens start working or get a driver's license they no longer are a part of youth fellowship. Essentially, in those churches youth fellowship functions for those younger than sixteen. This pattern is especially prevalent in churches where parents, feeling a need for preteen ministry (group one), lobby to have their preteens included in youth fellowship. Some churches are doing children's ministry and calling it youth fellowship.

In almost every case that I have observed or heard about, the thoughtful and careful separating of one larger youth fellowship group into two groups creates a larger total number of youth involved than before the separation. One strategy in separating the two groups is to allow those youth "on the borders" to decide which group they want to be a part of for that year. Then the following year the lines are completely delineated.

The vast majority of churches will probably have two youth fellowship groups. They may be under constant pressure to include the two groups who are still youth but not understood to be a part of youth fellowship: the preteen and the post-high school youth.

One of the pressing issues for the church is how to respond in ministry with/to/by youth at either end of the spectrum.

Time of Meeting

The traditional time of youth fellowship meetings has been Sunday evening, perhaps with a meal (see the preceding chapter). While for many churches this traditional Sunday evening time continues to work best, I would encourage you to explore alternatives, especially if the Sunday evening or late afternoon time doesn't seem to be working. Downtown and inner-city churches have had a difficult time getting youth to attend youth fellowship on Sunday evening. Differing patterns have worked for different churches when exploring times other than Sunday evening for youth fellowship. Some churches have gone to meeting right after worship; others to Saturday morning; some to after high school sports events, usually Friday evening; and others to a week-night meeting. Whatever time seems most appropriate given your intentions and the nature and character of the youth and community in which you are in ministry ought to be explored.

Most states still have "release" time available for religious instruction. This means that with permission of parents and with a regular ongoing "class," the youth can be "released" from school, during school time, for "religious instruction." Not enough of us take advantage of this opportunity. It strikes me that this is a perfect way to deal with confirmation classes. So remember to be creative when thinking about time.

If we move this discussion beyond youth fellowship to other forms of youth ministry, we need to become creative about meeting times. I have found breakfast before school to be a very helpful time for Bible study and some small-group gatherings, such as prayer groups or relational meetings with one or two youth. Lunch times can be another meeting time either in the school cafeteria or at a local fast food place, depending on school attendance policies. You may need permission of school officials to visit on the school campus or parental permission for the students to meet you off campus during lunch.

Meeting Place

The meeting place for youth fellowship has traditionally been at the church. I have long advocated that youth need a place at the church to call their "own"—a place they can help shape and mold into what they want; a place that they can call their own and a place where the church can say, "Yes, these youth are ours!" Unfortunately, a pattern from the late 1960s and early 1970s developed where the place the youth could call their own was removed from where everyone else in the church gathered. This pattern was to convert an old house next to the church property into a type of youth annex to the church. While it was helpful that the youth had a place to call their own, the fact that it was a building disconnected from the main church structure gave the impression, usually correctly, that the rest of the church wanted little if anything to do with the youth of the congregation. Yes, youth need a place to call their own, but they also need the support and willingness of the congregation to accept them and ministry with/to/by them as an integral part of the congregation.

We must not limit our concept of meeting place to the church. Many smaller programs are finding great success in meeting in homes or in other environments than the church building. Again, one's intentions and the particular nature of the group will have an effect on the choice of place.

You may want to consider using the spaces in which the others forms of youth ministry are gathering regularly. Perhaps the Bible study would be better held at someone's home or in the banquet room of a local restaurant for breakfast before

school starts. The environment the group meets in will help to set the tone for that particular meeting, so choose the meeting space wisely.

Publicity

One of the most difficult, but crucial, parts of youth ministry and youth fellowship is publicity. How can you let people know where and when meetings or gatherings will take place? The most difficult part of meeting in different places at different times is getting the word out to the appropriate people, as well as letting potential first timers know of the meeting. Compounding this problem is the fact that communities sometimes have very different ways of sharing information. For example, in some communities letting a few teens know about an event ensures that the word will spread to everyone. In other communities, letting a few teens know will not mean a thing. In some rural communities or small family-dominated churches, telling a few key youth or adults will get the event publicized. In those communities where all the youth attend one high school, dropping by the high school may effectively get the word out about an event or a change of plans to most of the youth.

In some places, especially large suburban churches a much more systematic and formal means of communication is necessary. Ideas about how to do publicity in these settings abound. I have heard of churches using a call-in number that has a recorded message with up-to-date information about the youth program. This system works much like calling the movie theater about times for movies that are playing. Many churches have tried, with varying success, the "old" telephone tree, in which certain young people or adult workers with youth are responsible for calling members of the group. Unfortunately, no matter how telephone trees are structured, they seem to break down after a few months. Of course, you may decide to take it upon yourself to call everyone. This can work if you have a small number of youth involved, and call around dinner time, when many people are home.

These methods of publicity are especially useful for regular attenders of the youth fellowship program. These forms of publicity are not as helpful in reaching potential new attenders.

Larger programs must usually find other ways to publicize their events. A multifaceted approach is recommended:

1. *Bulletins* are a helpful place to start. This means, of course, that the event needs some advanced planning and that someone is responsible for getting the event placed in the bulletin.

2. *Announcements* from the pulpit are also helpful. This lets the youth know that their activities are important and helps to keep the whole church informed. However, both of these methods assume that the appropriate people are in worship, which we know is not always the case.

3. The *church newsletter* is another must in publicity. While these articles are helpful, not everyone reads or bothers to keep the church newsletter for easy reference. Church newsletters run the gamut from monthly, chatty newsletters to brief weekly newsletters.

4. A *prominent bulletin board* in the church is a logical channel for publicizing the congregation's youth ministry. The bulletin board can highlight past as well as upcoming events. It can serve as a way to recognize youth and adults as they minister.

5. *Regular postcards* can keep people informed of events and save the cost of first-class mail. This seems to work best in those suburban congregations where the young people are spread around the community.

6. *Visiting local schools* to hand out and post flyers is another helpful publicity technique. Of course, this won't reach every youth, but it can be helpful to keep the events before the youth.

7. *Don't forget the telephone.* Even if telephone calling systems break down, they can still be useful. Telephone calls are more personal than a postcard or a letter and often give you an opportunity to develop the relational ministry of the church as well as to learn something more about the person on the other end of the telephone.

8. The *personal invitation* is still the most effective way to publicize events. While many times the specific information about an event is not remembered in a personal visit or with a personal invitation, the visit itself is most significant. A follow-up note can then be sent to confirm the particulars of the invitation.

Publicity and the Audience

This brings us to another significant problem with publicity: defining the audience to be addressed by the publicity. There are at least three audiences for any piece of youth publicity: the church, which wants to have a general idea of what is going on and some sense of how an event went; the parents or guardians of youth, who want the specific details, such as how much the activity will cost, permission slip deadlines, etc.; and the youth themselves, who are generally more interested in who else is going and what expectations will be placed on them if they go. It would be ideal to design each publicity piece for a specific audience. However, that may be beyond your resources, including budget and time. Still, you may want to fashion certain publicity pieces for specific audiences; for example, the announcement in the bulletin may be designed for the congregation as a whole, the letter to the parents, and the postcard as an excitement-building piece for the youth themselves.

Another helpful publicity tool is the youth newsletter. The most successful newsletters for youth are those designed, written, and produced by youth with help from adults. Many are erratic in schedule, coming out whenever the youth and adults have enough material and enough time and energy to produce the youth newsletter. While this type of newsletter is not always helpful for parents or for the dissemination of information about an upcoming event,

SAMPLE YOUTH POSTCARD

YO! Dudes and Dudeties, the outrageous spiritual life retreat will be held at Camp Otterbein, October 3 and 4! Jarnie, Cheryl, Jackie, Carl, and Jonie are already committed to going. To reserve your place, give this postcard to me, to the Bruders, or to someone from the church office. **BE THERE! ALOHA**

SAMPLE CHURCH NEWSLETTER AND BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT

ATTENTION! ATTENTION! The Ninth Annual Fall Spiritual Retreat for ninth and tenth graders will take place October 3 and 4 at Camp Otterbein. The Rev. Duffy James will be providing the program. For more information, contact Ed Dimmer or the Church Office. Let's all pray for the success of this retreat!

it can have a useful place in the congregation's youth ministry, especially in advocating for the voice of young people in the program and helping those in the program celebrate accomplishments.

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE PARENTS

August 30, 1994 Dear Parents:

The annual fall Spiritual Life Retreat for Mid-Highs (9th and 10th graders) will be held at Camp Otterbein (111-333-0000, emergency number), on October 3 and 4. The Bruders (Karl and Kris), Erica James, and Don Art will be chaperoning. Duffy James, the professor of evangelism from Nowhere Seminary, will be the speaker. Dr. James is an ordained UCC pastor and father of three teenagers.

The cost of the event is \$10, which includes transportation, room, and board. The \$10 fee must be paid to the church office by September 15. If we don't have on file in the church office a medical and parental consent form for your son or daughter for this year, please take care of this when you register your youth. A list of things for him or her to bring will be furnished at that time.

We will be leaving from the church parking lot at 9:00 A.M., Saturday morning, October 3, and plan to return to the church parking lot by 9:00 P.M. Sunday evening, October 4. Please let us know if we need to pick up or deliver your teen to another place besides the church.

Any questions? Give me a call or attend the fall parents' meeting, Monday, September 22, 7:00 P.M., in the church fellowship hall.

Yours in Christ,

Ed Trimmer

555-1000 (office) 555-2000 (home)

Budget and Finances

A perplexing problem for many youth fellowship and congregational youth ministries is the issue of budget and finances. Each denomination and individual church has different ideas on how stewardship fits into the life of the individual Christian and the life of the congregation.

For example, some churches do not believe in fund raisers. All monies for the church and its ministry are to be raised through the budget. In these cases, one must present a very organized and thorough budget request to the appropriate church committee up to a year and a half in advance. This calls for a high level of organization and structure in the budget request process for the congregation's youth ministry.

Other churches, while allowing for fund raisers, never want to have them in the church on Sunday. While not excluding fund raising, they set restrictions on where and how money is to be raised. They refer to Jesus and the moneychangers in the Temple, and state that they don't want to raise money on Sunday during worship. In these churches, careful planning must be done before any attempt to raise money for youth ministry is undertaken.

Other churches do not want any youth ministry money to come from the church budget. Rather, they believe the youth and interested parents ought to raise the entire youth ministry budget. This puts undue hardship on that program. What other part of the church's ministry has to raise its entire budget? Adult workers in these churches often experience burnout as they grow tired of raising money. I question the theological implication of asking youth to pay to be in mission with and for the congregation.

Some churches have established traditions where they have been able to raise significant sums of money for youth ministry. Many times through a single fund raiser, such as selling pumpkins at Thanksgiving or Christmas trees at Christmas, a church can raise its entire youth budget. I have seen examples of congregations raising over fifteen thousand dollars in this manner.

Still other churches operate without a budget structure. These churches spend money as God leads them, or as money is made available to them. In these churches, keeping the need and the vision of youth ministry before the congregation on a regular basis is a necessity.

However, most churches operate with a system of church-budgeted resources for youth ministry and fund raisers to supplement the budget. Traditionally salary and curriculum resources have come from the church budget, with money for programs such as fun/fellowship, work camp, and other ministries being raised outside of the budget process.

Choosing the fund raiser that works for you depends on many factors, including how much money you need to raise; how many youth and adults are willing to be involved; what other fund raisers are operating in your community; and the population you target, your church or the larger community. Many communities are overwhelmed with fund raisers from every group imaginable. If that is the case in your community, it may be time to emphasize the budget process rather than compete for limited fund-raising dollars. Parents of teens can feel this monetary stress in incredible ways when every organization their teen belongs to is trying to raise money, and they as parents are expected not only to contribute monetarily but to help in the fund-raising process as well.

In developing a budget for youth ministry to present to the budget-making committee of your congregation, emphasize how and where the money will be spent. It may be helpful to indicate how the money was spent the year before. Pictures and slides can be very effective in this process. The youth fellowship historian, whose function it is to record youth events with pictures and pertinent data for the records of the church, can be called upon to explain (sell) the budget to the congregation. Pictures help not only in publicity, advertising, and keeping tradition, but also in securing budgetary requests from official church boards and agencies. Many excellent youth ministries have been unrealized simply because leaders were unable to get the message (vision) across to the appropriate people in the church or larger community who held the purse strings.

I am one who favors spending the church's budgeted money on resources and programs designed to further the spiritual development of youth, such as camps and spiritual retreats, and not on fun/fellowship events. I believe the church ought to pay for all the resources needed for any aspect of the church's youth ministry—guest speakers, films, even magazine subscriptions for you to receive at home.

Knowing that the cost of fun and fellowship events can get out of hand, especially for families with lesser financial resources than others in the community, one ought always to be on the lookout for scholarship money. Many church groups, especially women's and men's fellowships, are willing to provide scholarships for youth to attend specific programs. You may also want to have a budgeted scholarship fund.

Certainly spending money for youth ministry is not in and of itself a way of judging a congregation's faithfulness. But it can be an indication of whether a congregation is serious about emphasizing and supporting its youth ministry.

Officers

Many youth fellowships operate without any type of elected officers. Other youth fellowships have myriad elected officials. Which is best for your youth fellowship depends once again on your intentions. A helpful rule of thumb is to determine whether the young people who are elected to office have an important function. If so, then you probably need to elect them; if not, why go through the charade of having officers?

The election of officers comes from a time when youth fellowships were run much like women's or men's organizations in a local church. The officers had specific functions and were held accountable to the tasks by the group. In many places, the specific functions that officers were needed for are no longer in place. In other youth fellowships, youth and adults refuse to hold officers accountable to their position and duties.

I have found several positions to be helpful in the way I have structured youth fellowship.

1. The *youth fellowship historian* keeps (and usually takes) photographs, videos, or written records of the events the youth fellowship (or youth ministry) participates in throughout the year. He or she also keeps files from past events. These records may have many uses, including being turned into slides to use to justify budget requests, used as gifts to outgoing seniors, or for publicity purposes.

2. A *treasurer* is also needed, if the adults and the church will allow youth to actually handle and deal with money matters. This is not a job for the parents of the youth who was elected treasurer. It is a position that ought to operate in conjunction with the adult in the youth fellowship who is handling and dealing with money and budget requests and disbursements.

3. *Publicity* may be the job that requires the most work. If you recall our discussion on publicity a few short pages ago, you realize the enormous task that may face a youth in coordinating and putting together the publicity. This job may mean everything from changing the bulletin board every week to writing the bulletin announcements or the youth article in the newsletter each week. Many times this job can be performed by two or three youth working in concert.

4. Most churches have *youth representatives* in the official governing structure of the church. Youth in these positions need to be willing to advocate for youth, and they need to understand and appreciate the more formal process of making decisions. It is most helpful to elect youth to specific representative bodies rather than to simply send the "president" as the representative in all cases. And it can be helpful to assign an adult from each committee to work as a mentor with the youth representative, guiding the youth in the workings of the committee.

5. Selecting a youth to *serve on the program planning team* can create another helpful office. While some churches do planning as a total group; and others have just the adults do all the planning, I favor a mutual process where adults and youth join together in the planning process.¹

6. As for *president* and *vice president*, you must determine what the function of each office is to be before electing youth to fill these roles. Most youth fellowships have gotten away from a business meeting youth to fill these roles. Most youth fellowships have gotten away from a business meeting youth to fill these roles. I'm not convinced that that model of youth fellowship meetings is helpful in this day and age. So I would avoid having president and vice-president positions in youth fellowships.

Electing people to positions with clearly defined roles can help to alleviate the problem of turning the election into a popularity contest. Having midterm or yearly evaluations where the fellowship group evaluates the job performance of those elected can help individuals take responsibility for doing the jobs they were elected to do.

Business Meetings

As I said earlier, some youth fellowships include a business meeting that is conducted by the elected officers. In recent years, this type of meeting has fallen out of style, in part because there wasn't much business to conduct because adult workers with youth made the decisions, and because the combined junior high/senior high youth fellowships were not conducive to business meetings.

Other youth fellowships have been able to include business meetings. In these cases the meetings are run very efficiently by officers who have a clear agenda and with a youth fellowship group that understands business-meeting protocol—how to participate in a business meeting.

Whether your youth fellowship wants to have business meetings depends, once again, on your intentions. Most groups today deal informally with things that might have been covered in a business meeting, such as reports from planning committees or announcements about upcoming programs. If your group decides it wants to have a business meeting, the group and its officers must learn how to run business meetings quickly and efficiently.

Developing Youth Leaders

In times past, youth fellowships had a very clear role in developing youth to be leaders. Youth learned by participating in and by leading church meetings. Youth fellowships put a premium on helping youth learn how to run a meeting and teaching youth how to participate in large church situations where decisions were made. Part of the intentions of youth fellowships were to create youth leaders who were familiar with the church structure and how decisions were made, not only in the local church but in the national church as well. Youth participation was coveted by national denominational church groups, and so youth progressed from local to national leadership positions.

Today people have different perspectives on youth leaders. Some adults think a leader is one who affects the system from within; others think of moral leadership; others think of a leader as one whom other youth will agree to follow. The dynamics of youth leadership are much more complex than these three perspectives suggest, but they point to the problem.

Certainly, youth fellowships ought to develop youth to become leaders. But what is a leader? There is no consensus as to what real Christian leadership means, thus it is difficult to train youth to be leaders in the church. What are the characteristics of a leader? How does one "teach" them? As you answer those questions for your congregation, you can begin to focus on developing youth who are leaders in the church's youth fellowship program.

Youth Involved in Programming

In some congregations youth actually provide much of the programming, not only in terms of content but also in terms of leadership. In some churches this is limited to youth fellowships, while other churches allow young people to teach classes in the Christian education program.

If your congregation desires to have youth provide much of the programming (in other words, it is your intentions to have youth develop and lead the programmatic ministry), the youth must be given some training for this duty.

Evangelism (or Increasing Your Attendance)

As Christians, we are called to share God's message with the world. In the church this has been called evangelism. Some churches confuse increasing attendance with evangelism. While evangelism may increase attendance, it does not necessarily have to, for the people you evangelize may go to another church or fit into the youth ministry of your congregation in another manner besides youth fellowship. Similarly, you may increase the attendance at youth fellowship without doing any evangelism.

If your goal is simply to increase attendance in youth fellowship, you probably need to concentrate on community and show-up types of programs. You will need to make increased attendance one of your main intentions and work toward that goal, rather than simply talk about it and go about business as usual.

A former student of mine was hired to increase the attendance of a youth fellowship and did so rather quickly. In four months the attendance had doubled and then doubled again, but the congregation was unhappy. It seems that none of the new attenders were members of the church or connected in any way to the church. The meetings were taking place not on Sunday night, but on Wednesday night. The meetings were in the homes of these newly recruited young people. So before you attempt to increase attendance at youth fellowship, be sure to clarify your intentions or the intentions of the church. Why do you want more youth in this part of your youth ministry? Are you ready to change what you have been doing in youth fellowship to bring in new members?

Another former student of mine was interviewing at a church who wanted her to minister to youth full time. The adults wanted youth fellowship attendance to increase. She attended two youth fellowship meetings and quickly surmised that one of the reasons why the numbers were so low was that the programs were not meeting the needs of youth, and so many youth had stopped attending. Now for the five youth who were attending the fellowship, the meetings were perfect, and they did not want them to change. So while the adults wanted the numbers to increase in youth fellowship, the youth wanted their fellowship to stay exactly the way it was.

Sometimes congregations forget that in having youth who are active in a "failing" program, the church is not listening to the youth who have chosen not to be a part of this program, or who may have a totally different perspective from those youth who are active. I've seen this many times in denominational youth gatherings. The youth who are elected to serve on committees and church structures that determine the direction of the denomination's youth ministry are the very ones who have an investment in keeping the youth ministry the same as it always has been, for that is what these youth know and what has ministered to them. Those youth who haven't been served by the denomination's youth ministry are not in a position to be elected to any of the offices or positions that could change the denomination's youth ministry.

How might one increase attendance? One strategy would be to divide the group in two, as this usually produces immediate growth of a couple of people, especially if the original group is a combined junior high/senior high fellowship. Another strategy might be to assign every youth and adult two persons you have identified who might want to become part of the church's youth fellowship. These persons would make at least two weekly contacts with the prospective member on an ongoing basis. In the terms we have been using, the youth and adults already attending youth fellowship would develop a personal relationship

with these people who are not attending and continually invite them to community and show-up level programming. Another strategy would be to ask several adults to commit to spending their free time at the local high school, getting to know youth, developing relationships with them, and inviting them to meetings. One strategy that I would not recommend (because I am not convinced it is faithful), but that has been "successful," is to create all kinds of contests with prizes. I am familiar with a church that began to have contests that gave away CD players, \$100 cash, and other expensive awards to increase attendance. The attendance in the program climbed quickly as the word spread about these "prizes." I encourage you to measure your methods against a standard of faithfulness you have set with the help of your congregation.

A significant issue to remember is that it is easier to get people to start attending in August and September, the start of school, than it is in February. Also, it is often easier to get people who are not members of your church to attend, as they do not have negative experiences that must be overcome.

If you are really interested in evangelism and not just in increasing attendance, most of your denomination's evangelism programs can easily be adapted to a youth population. If evangelism is truly your goal, you may need to help young people feel comfortable with talking about their faith. Youth will listen to other youth, who can talk in their own language about what the faith has meant and means to them. As youth are better able to express their faith in their own words, and as they attempt to live out their faith in their community, evangelism becomes much more a reality in the local community.

Jennifer, Dave, and Betsy knew they faced a lot of issues in creating and dealing with their youth fellowship, but they also had a sense that they were on the right path. They looked over their notes and decided that they were ready to start a youth fellowship group.