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 youth 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 is 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall – Scripture</th>
<th>Spring - Sacraments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>September</strong></td>
<td><strong>January</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Social Night – Kickoff party</td>
<td>- No Youth Group – Christmas Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Curriculum Night – Intro to the Bible</td>
<td>- Social Night – Spring Kickoff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Curriculum Night – Creation/Adam and Eve and the Fall</td>
<td>- Curriculum Night – Intro Sacraments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Issue Night – Dignity of the Human Person (incorporate Service Project)</td>
<td>- Issue Night – Pro-life issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>October</th>
<th>February</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Social Night – Movie Night</td>
<td>- Curriculum Night – Baptism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Curriculum Night – Mary</td>
<td>- Social Night – Ice skating outing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Issue Night – Chastity</td>
<td>- Curriculum Night – Eucharist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>November</th>
<th>March</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Social Night – Holloween Party</td>
<td>- Curriculum Night – Reconciliation/Sacraments of healing (offer Adoration/Reconciliation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Curriculum Night – Gospels/Life of Christ</td>
<td>- Issue Night – Almsgiving (incorporate service project)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Issue Night – Social Media</td>
<td>- Curriculum Night –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- No Youth Group – Thanksgiving</td>
<td>- Social Night – Game night</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>December</th>
<th>April</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Curriculum Night – Pentecost/Holy Spirit</td>
<td>- No Youth Group – Easter (date will vary from year to year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Issue Night - Materialism</td>
<td>- Curriculum Night – Marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Social Night – Christmas Party</td>
<td>- Issue Night – same-sex marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- No Youth Group – Christmas Break</td>
<td>- Social Night – bowling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>May</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Curriculum Night - Confirmation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Curriculum Night – Living out the Sacraments</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Social Night – end of year party</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**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

**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

**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**
- **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.