

# Low Cost Ideas for a Tight Budgeted Youth Ministry

*Revised: 1/23/09 Matt Parker, Simpsonwood UMC for Youth Ministry Institute*

Take a moment to imagine that you are the Director of Youth Ministries for a church that has a \$500 budget for youth ministry. The average household income for your community is \$50,000-\$60,000 and your ministry has 20-30 active participants. How difficult is it for you to plan activities knowing you have little to no funds? What are some of the decisions you have to make about your ministry? What do you find to be the most influential factor in your decision making process?

With the turn in the economy, most churches are feeling the pinch. Admittedly, those who have not felt the tightening the proverbial belt recognize that it is approaching their community of faith. Several churches in our area are experiencing budget cuts of mass proportions (one might saying budget gouging). Many programs and ministries are being left at the curb because the church can no longer afford such programs and ministries. Staff members at churches are experiencing salary reductions or demotions from full-time to part-time. And worst of all, many are losing their jobs as a part of layoffs within the church. The truth is that the church is not immune to the difficulties of our economy.

But how is this impacting our youth ministries and what can we learn from these tough times. The primary focus of youth ministry is building relationships with teenagers and guiding those teenagers into a relationship with Jesus Christ. We can become so wrapped up in providing programs, scholarships, trips and cool prizes when we have money. But without the money we are forced to focus on the value of relationships. Here are some questions to ask yourself about your ministry, both individually and within your church.

## **What is the single most important factor in your ministry?**

*Allow your ministry to become more relationship-driven and less budget-driven. Spend extra time building relationships with your youth, volunteers and parents in your church. Send more e-mails. Make more phone calls. Leave a message on Facebook. The relationships you develop today are what will impact these people tomorrow.*

## **What are some of the tough times your are facing at your church?**

*Churches rely on the pledges and financial support of the congregation. When those in your congregation are hurting, you are hurting. Our church has experienced a huge budget cut, salary cuts and many programs and ministries cut. Despite all of the tough times, do not allow yourself to become discouraged. Be thankful for what you have.*

## **How have you and your ministry been able to adapt to the tough economy?**

*Work with other ministries and partner with other churches in your community to provide fundraisers. Keep an open line of communication with parents in your church. Let them know how a financial shortfall within the church will impact their family. This will allow them time to prepare. Remember to always keep your Senior Pastor and Finance Team in the loop regarding issues of money. Allow them to preview all correspondence to parents BEFORE you send it out. Turn to a more "grassroots" style of youth ministry.*

## **What are some ideas that you could share that would have little to no cost and still be impactful?**

*Plan a board game/BINGO night for your kids. Have a dollar movie night for families (Note: You must attain a license to properly show movies to a large crowd.) Hold more local service projects. It costs nothing to collect canned goods for your local food pantry.*

## **Why is it important for us to be respectful of the economy and the financial situation of many families?**

*We have the opportunity to teach our teenagers and church members that money is not important for real ministry to take place. Real ministry can and will happen with or without money.*

Jesus was a carpenter. Peter was a fisherman. Paul was a tent-maker. Although none of them would have been considered to be affluent in their society, all of them were able to minister effectively to thousands and ultimately change the entire New Testament world.

### **Fundraising Ideas**

Equal Exchange- Partner with this organization to sell products (coffee, chocolate, etc.) and receive a portion of the profit for your church. More information available at [www.equalexchange.coop](http://www.equalexchange.coop)

Babysitting Night- Reserve the church nursery and let your teenagers babysit kids in the community. You can either ask for donations or set a price per child. Make it a day long event and turn the day into a mini-VBS.

Talent Show/Dinner Theater- Utilize the talent of your teenagers and adults in your congregation and community. Serve a cheap dinner (spaghetti!) and let people enjoy the talent. You can also provide a silent or live auction for goods, services or gift baskets.

Christmas Tree Pickup- Set up a couple of days after Christmas to pick up Christmas trees in your community. Notify people ahead of time and set a price per tree. Deliver the trees to your local fire station for recycling.

Movie Night- ***You will have to purchase a license to show a movie.*** Show a movie for your congregation or community and charge \$1 for entry. Sell snacks and popcorn for additional funds.

Santa's Helpers- For a small donation, parents submit a list of presents purchased for their child. Allow your teenagers or adult males to call the home and pretend to be an elf or Santa's helper (or Santa himself). Talk to the child about the presents they will be receiving.

Set up a Foundation- Although this requires a lot of legal legwork, it is something that could ultimately be beneficial during the next economic downfall.

### **Additional Fundraising Ideas**

[www.churchbiz.com/youth\\_fundraising.htm](http://www.churchbiz.com/youth_fundraising.htm)

### **Additional Resources**

Warden, Michael and Nappa, Mike, Low Cost, No Cost Ideas for Youth Ministry. Group Publishing, Inc. 1994.