

GROUP-BASED MINISTRY

THE 'WHY':

Children and youth have spiritual and developmental needs that are distinct from those of adults. Their lives revolve around their age group: school, peers, teams and hobbies encourage them to grow and learn within the group. Churches should provide Group-Based ministries in order to engage children and youth on a level that is natural and familiar to them, and that addresses issues of faith on a level specific to their maturity.

THE PRACTICE:

The goal of Group-Based Ministry is to host events and activities that will encourage children and youth of similar ages to develop relationships with one another. In these relationships, a 'core' group is established and encouraged to invite other friends to join. The content of the events is usually a mix of games, entertainment, crafts, trips/retreats, music, etc. and will vary depending on the preferences of the group. The method and degree of Christian discipleship will vary depending on the composition of the group and leadership.

A mature and effective Group-Based Ministry will have both of the following elements present:

1. 'Contact Events' intended for children and youth that have little or no Christian background. These events are primarily for fun, entertainment, and friendship building; and have very little Christian education. **The typical Friday night 'Youth Group' is a Contact Event.** The purpose is to serve as an introduction point to Christianity, not to serve as an entry point into the worship and ministry of the congregation. These events may seem little more than social activities, but they are the primary method of evangelism and group growth.
2. 'Discipleship Events' intended for children and youth who want to develop their faith beyond the 'contact' level. These events will have a greater focus on Christian education. **The typical Sunday School or Vacation Bible School is a Discipleship Event.** These events will usually have a smaller attendance than the 'Contact Events'. If you are starting a Group-Based ministry from scratch, it may take a year or more of 'Contact Events' to develop a core group for 'Discipleship Events'. These are the groups that have the potential to serve as entry points into the life and worship of the church.

It is essential that churches engaging in Group-Based Ministry establish a plan that includes Contact Events and Discipleship Events. The most common FAILURE POINT of Group-Based Ministry is the frustration and conflict produced when these two elements are not recognized or held in balance.

The Plan for Our Parish....

- **Count the Cost:** Group-Based ministry requires facilities, funding, technology, leadership, and time. Make sure you have it.
- **Manage your Expectations:** it is not realistic to expect that a Group-Based ministry will grow your congregation. It is not realistic to expect Discipleship Events to have the same attendance as Contact Events.
- If you already have children and youth in your congregation, ask them to help plan the ministry
- **Avoid the 'Numbers Game'.** The goal of Group-Based ministry is that the groups will grow and replenish, but success is not defined by quality of relationship, not the number of attendees.

Hints for Starting From Scratch:

- Listen to the community around you; talk to youth and community officials; find out what the youth in your community need. That is your starting point.
- Cast a wide net with Contact Events that include sports, music, movies, food, and awareness of issues that affect young people
- Be willing to work outside the walls. Perhaps your church is a wonderful facility, but your group-based ministry may be more effective in the community centre, or wherever youth are accustomed to gathering.
- Group-Based ministry almost never grows as expected, and sometimes is full of false starts. Be prepared to 'go with the flow'.