

# Planning a Youth Night

## *A Guide to Creating a Youth Night Using the Ecclesial Method*

One of the most difficult things to do in the Church today is to teach to young people the faith in a way that is engaging and relatable. With all of the stuff that is in the lives of young people, it can be hard to present the gospel message to them. The youth of our country spend roughly 7 hours a day in a classroom and a number of hours more at home studying and doing homework so the last thing most of them want to do is come to youth group and sit for two hours listening to someone lecture them on the faith. Our Catholic faith is real and alive and so in order for it to be passed on, it must be taught in a way that is engaging and alive. This document contains some simple tips for planning youth group nights that teach the faith through a concrete and systematic method while remaining engaging to the young people that participate.

### **The Ecclesial Method**

There are a number of methods out there for teaching young people. The *Ecclesial Method* is one way that incorporates 5 simple steps that allow youth nights to be engaging, informative, and challenging allowing for those who participate to take what they learn and apply it into everyday life. Below are the 5 steps and descriptions on how to implement them:

#### **1. Preparation**

Before diving into a topic pertaining to the faith, it is important to understand the mind of a young person and meet them where they are coming from. For the most part, those coming to youth group have not spent their day delving through theology books, memorizing Sacred Scripture, or pondering the very depths of our being and our relationship with God. Most teens are spending their day at school, participating in sports or other activities, or hanging out with their friends. One of the worst things that we can do is take a group of teens who have just arrived at youth group and immediately throw them into a lecture in the faith. Rather, teens, and anyone for that matter, must be gradually ushered into a teaching on the faith.

The best way to do this is by preparing the teen through what's called "calculated disengagement". It is important for a youth night to begin by gradually but intentionally disengaging a teen from the environment that they have arrived from and engaging them into the current environment. Great ways to do this can be through meals or fellowship time allowing a few minutes of socialization before the night begins, a game or hands on activity that is fun and engaging while pertaining to the topic of the night, music or video clips, and ultimately prayer.

Preparing a teen by gradually incorporating them into the night is critical in gaining a teen's interest and trust. When we can engage them and grab their attention, they are more likely to enter into what the night has to offer.

## 2. Proclamation

The next step in engaging and teaching teens through the ecclesial method is through the Proclamation. The proclamation is a key word, sentence, phrase, quote, or Scripture verse that sums up the message for the night. It's important that this is simple and short so that a teen can grasp it and easily remember it.

For example, if you were doing a youth night on sin and forgiveness, you may choose to use this proclamation: "*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.* (Romans 6:23)" The verse is very short and easy to remember, yet it encapsulates the topic and provides something very powerful for the student to take home with them.

The proclamation can be introduced at the beginning during the opening prayer or introduction to the night. It should also be repeated several times throughout the night in a talk, small groups by small group leaders, during prayer, or any other time.

## 3. Explanation

The third step in the Ecclesial Method is the Explanation. The explanation is the main teaching part of the night. Many times, the explanation is done as a short talk or teaching. It can also be done as a personal witness or testimony or a hands on activity. However it is done, be sure to make it engaging to the audience. Here are a few examples of how to do the explanation:

### A Brief Talk/Teaching

Talks are typically the easiest and most frequently used way but sometimes they are the most difficult to engage with. For a talk to be effective it must be engaging. Try not to go longer than 10 or 15 minutes (20 tops for a really good speaker). Using a good attention grabber at the beginning such as a story, video, or analogy is a good start. For the main body, stick to only 2 or 3 main points. Any more than that and it is a good chance that you will lose your audience. Challenge the listener by giving them concrete ways in which the topic can relate to their life and finally make sure your talk is centered on Christ and littered with Scripture.

### Personal Witness/Testimony

Another good method to teach is through personal witnesses or testimonies. These brief personal talks can be very effective because they can provide a real life example on the topic that can relate to the audience. Witnesses can be done on their own or along with a talk.

### Group Participative Activities

Some topics can lend themselves to teachings that aren't necessarily done through talks or lectures. They can be done in small group or large group activities that can allow teens to learn a topic just as well.

For example, if you were doing a youth night on parables, rather than having someone speak about parables for 15 minutes, you could have a brief explanation on what a parable is and then break into small groups for the teens to write their own parables.

### Prayer and Meditation

For some topics, incorporating a prayer or guided meditation can allow for a solid explanation. For example, if you were doing a night on the passion and death of Jesus, the explanation could be doing the Stations of the Cross.

As stated before, often times the explanation will take the form of a talk. While this is certainly not a bad thing, it is a good idea to mix it up a little from time to time and try out other ways to deliver a teaching.

## **4. Application**

Following the Explanation, it is important that the teens have a concrete way to understand how the topic directly applies to their own life. And so application activities are important. The application can be done through a number of ways. Often times, it is done through small groups where the teens have designated time to discuss the topic. Small groups are effective but require a good a small group leader and usually guided discussion questions.

Other ways to do the application step can be through small or large group activities or through prayer. Whatever the application may be, be sure to vary it from time to time. Don't simply do small groups for every meeting but allow for different ways that the teen can see and practice how the topic relates to their life.

## **5. Celebration**

Finally, the last step in the Ecclesial method is the celebration. This step should aim at wrapping up the night and tying everything together. It should also serve as a time of empowerment for the teens to go and put their faith into practice. This can be done through a brief wrap up by the youth minister, a video, a skit, or a game that is relevant to the evening. Finally, every night should end in prayer and an encouragement for prayer in daily life going forward from the night

## **Other Things to Keep in Mind**

### **Preparing for the Night**

In planning a youth night, be sure to take an adequate amount of time to plan and prepare for the night. Make sure that you have enough volunteers. Make a checklist of items and supplies that you will need for the night to be successful. Meet with your core team before the night to run through everything with them and make sure everyone is in the position that they need to be in. And finally but most importantly, PRAY!!!

### **Environment**

One of the best ways to evangelize and teach through a youth night is by providing a good environment. You can plan the most amazing youth night in the world but if it takes place in a location that is plain or not relevant, than it can disrupt the focus and attention of the night. Always set some sort of sacred space that is visible and central. This can include a bible, a cross, statues, or anything else that can pull someone into a deeper state of prayer and reverence. Decorated the room to correspond to the night. Try to go as all-out as possible. Even if they do not admit it, teens will appreciate and remember good environments which can plant seeds and aid in evangelization.

### **Going forward from the night**

When the youth night is over, don't just clean up and leave. Be sure to meet with your core team at some point to discuss the night. Talk about the highs and lows, what worked and what didn't work. Get as much feedback as you can which can go a long way in planning for future nights or events.