

Summer Ministry

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INTRO

This summer marks 6 years of me running a full summer program, and 6 years of it being a game changer for me and my ministry. Like many of you I spent many years not running summer ministry. Maybe the odd event here or there or adhoc meetings with generally lots of good intentions and very little fruit.

MY JOURNEY

That system led to years and years of ministry where I would look back on the previous summer and say “nope that didn’t work” and repeat the same cycle or just not bother to try. Eventually I would find myself at a job where I had a different conversation with my Executive Pastor. He challenge me to run a full program because "Church didn't stop in the summer so why should my Youth Ministry". At time I thought he was totally wrong and the whole thing was going to be a bust. But he was my boss and so I went into it kicking and screaming.

I thought that it would be ineffective and no one would show up. When my first summer event came I expected maybe 1/3 of my usual group if any one at all. Within 10min I knew I had a problem... more kids showed up then I expected, like 3x more kids. It wasn’t just once it was every single week ALL SUMMER LONG.

Ever since then I have come to believe that Summer Ministry is one of the most vital times in Youth Ministry and we should be CRANKING it up bigger and better then ever before. However, I have had to fight to sell that vision and work to get people to understand why we shouldn’t shut down June 1 and pick back up Mid-September.

THE THREE BIG COMMENTS

I have found over the years that I consistently get the same 3 comments when I talk about summer ministry. They are always the same and 100% valid but it doesn’t mean there are not solutions.

1) The Pastors and Leaders need a break

This is the most common one and the one I used a lot back in the day. The argument is that volunteers don’t want to give a whole year and youth ministry is stressful enough without adding a summer season. The answer to this issue is both YES and NO. It’s true some volunteers need time off in the summer. However, in the majority of cases ALL your volunteers don’t actually need the whole summer off. Maybe a week or two to afford some flexibility but I’ve found that most actually MISS YOUTH GROUP in the summer. Furthermore, yes youth ministry is stressful and crazy sometimes but don’t forget you are the architect of your own world. You can control how crazy things get and how much work has to go into the events.

Solutions

- Shutdown Small Groups and any other activity you do that is Leader heavy and give your team the flexibility to come and go throughout the summer.
- If you're worried about ratio's have them sign up for specific weeks to make sure you're covered.
- Pick a slower pace for your group. Lots of games and relationship time and less teaching.
 - One summer we played Ultimate for an hour, had snack and I just read parables from the bible and talked about it for 5-10min then had prayer groups... that was it super simple.
- TAKE TIME OFF and let your leaders run the show.

2) I need the summer to prep for the fall

This is my favourite excuse for a lack of summer ministry because it actually makes no sense. Typically, as Youth pastors we split the world into Fall (Sep-Dec), Winter (Jan-Mar), Spring (Apr-June) and Summer (July-Aug). We cut out summer ministry because we need TIME TO PREPARE for the fall. But we don't cut out WINTER to prepare for SPRING... that would make no sense at all. Throughout the year we work and plan at the same time. Maybe we have a big year long plan but most of the time we operate season to season. So why do we skip summer to get ready for the fall, why not stay in gear and keep pushing through. It is always easier to stay in gear then it is to come to a HARD STOP then try and rally everyone back together 2 months later.

Solutions

Plan your summers like you plan the rest of the year (Stay in gear)

- **Start of May** - Put summer planning on your to do list
- **Mid May** - Dream up some amazing events and ASK FOR INPUT from your kids and leaders
- **End Of May** - Figure out if you need to book anything
- **Start of June** - Take your dreams and create a short list of 8-10 events . One for each week depending on the calendar year.
 - **NOTE:** I try for a Event/Teach/Teach etc rotation and it seems to work well.
- **Mid June** - Create a summer calendar with all your Dates, Times and Location. Even if you're light on details. Think of it as a SAVE THE DATE card
- **End Of June** - Handout some kind of Calendar/Invite/Newsletter/Flyer to give away at your Year End Party. We all have them and they are always well attended. Make sure its easy for them to give to others.
- **1st Week July** - Kick off with your first event.
- **Last week Aug** - Hand out your Fall information ESPECIALLY any kick off event information.

3) All my students go away

This last one is a MYTH that needs to be busted open. ALL YOUR KIDS don't go away, if you or your leaders say or believe this is true than your scope of vision is limited. The challenge is that many kids do leave BUT not all of them. Maybe your/their Small Groups does leave for the summer but the Leader next to you might have all of their kids. Sometimes what seems like ALL is actually only a few core kids that take up your field of vision most weeks. In a modern world many of our families CAN NOT afford to go away in the summer. In reality most of our kids are at home... without a sweet and amazing place to beat the summer heat. The challenge is to look past the core and see the potential.

Solutions

- Take a look at your entire current database and see who is actually going to be here for the summer and TARGET them for summer ministry.
- You could take a poll of who will be around this summer BUT take it with a grain of salt and make sure you work the whole group. Let everyone speak don't just go to your REGULAR kids.
- Look to the fringe not the core for support
- **GOLDEN RULE:** One kid is better than no kids and no kids is an opportunity to pray for the one kid.

WHY SUMMER MINISTRY MATTERS?

Now let me give you three reasons why Summer Ministry matters and why you need to make it work.

1) Every kid matters even the one kid

This was the hardest lesson I learnt because I was so tempted to say that fifteen kids was worth my time but not five or one. Yes, we all want a crowd and to blow it out big each and every week. However, some of my best ministry moments have not been with the crowd but rather the 1 student that came out. Years ago we had one of those odd nights in Summer Ministry where only like five kids came out and we had twelve leaders on site that week. We packed them up and I took the whole group for food. We were in a 2-3 Leaders per kid situation and it was amazing and some of the best relational time we had that summer. God has made you the Pastor/Leader of every kid that comes to your group not just the crowd but the one.

2) Sets you up for the fall in an amazing way

Right now I run only 2 grades and we invite the grade 10 students to join us as soon as July starts. The reason for that is that for the most part I get a solid group of Grade 10 (soon to be my 11's) out for the summer. That way by September this core group is completely bought in, in love, and ready to tell the world about all the epic things they did at youth that summer. For me Summer Ministry is the SINGLE BEST TOOL I have to setting up my September for success. Instead of coming to the Fall Kick Off event

new, green, and scared. They come confident, bought in, and old pros. That core group now starts inviting friends and its infinitely easier for them to do that then it is for us as leaders.

3) Your kids will always have a place to belong.

This is the #1 reason why I do Summer Ministry. There is nothing special about the summer season that makes it work in my opinion. It's not the weather or less things to compete with that help kid come out. I believe the #1 reason is, when we run all year round we have a better chance at creating a safe place for kids to belong. Right now in my group there is Youth Ministry 48 weeks a year. For my students that means that no matter what's going on in their lives they can show up at the church on a youth night and find their "Youth Family" ready for them. That kind of consistency is life changing when you're a teen. Their life, drama and challenges don't stop June 1 and pick back up Mid-September. They are facing things everyday and God has given them to you in this season to care for them. Is it hard work YES, but the reward is eternal.

CHALLENGE

Here is my challenge for you: run through the whole summer this summer. Follow the steps above and see what God wants to do. If you're going in late and summer has already started then pick the month of August and run hard that month. Create a 4-5 week plan, bring others on board, and look for and target the non-core kids. Trust me, there is value in Summer Ministry and if you need help shoot me an email.