Epic Engagement

Small Group and Large Group Evangelization

Small and Large Groups are such a vital and life changing part of our youth ministries. With the opportunity to be in community and build solid, healthy holy relationships with our peers, teens have the ability to be strengthened and encouraged in their faith walk. The large group gathering space allows for teens to be welcomed in a safe place to gather and meet with other teens and adults to be evangelized before becoming part of a small group. The small group setting offers opportunities for teens to be invited or to request gathering one to go deeper. They are at a more committed stage of their faith. Teens who are not yet evangelized may not experience as much effectiveness from a resource set up for small groups.

**A few reminders for successful small groups:**

* + - Small groups are not your opportunity to teach
    - We were given two ears and one mouth for a reason
    - The more you listen the better you will know them, giving you an opportunity to change their lives (you cannot change what you don’t understand)
    - Good speaking: centering group, rounding out discussion, asking thought provoking & open ended questions
    - Unnecessary speaking: giving your opinion, counseling, sharing all of the Bible vs and CCC references that relate to the topic…
    - Some weeks teens will talk more and things will be better than others! That’s ok!
    - Everyone should sit on the same level—including the adult (s)

Preparation

* Be prepared both prayerfully and physically
* The first time a teen hears a small group question should not be the first time you are reading a small group question. E-mail your volunteers the outline with questions a head of time.
* Pray through the teaching to help your own spiritual development. Think and wrestle with how it impacts your own faith.
* Assess any fears you have when leading small groups – do you get uncomfortable when the teens ask questions, do you try and avoid any silence or processing time, do you talk too much or try to give a “new talk”? Find out where you are weak and ask the YM for help on how to improve your small group skills

Relational Ministry

* Walk with them
* Learn their names
* Journey to get to know them
* Go where they are – relational ministry
* Make sure that you talk to them OUTSIDE of small group time
* Try to remember questions, topics, & prayer requests that they bring up and then reference them in small groups the following week, or have a plan to check in with them.

**There has recently been a shift in thinking about large and small group dynamics in youth ministry.** **When Small Groups are “an addition to” and not an “in place of” a large group environment, ministry can thrive!**

**We need each parish to have a strategy for both large and small groups and here’s why!**

1. Small and Large Groups are complementary to each other. They need each other, and they can benefit and thrive because of the other.
2. We want to have sustainable youth ministry programs. Therefore, we need a workflow to approach together a core team to help build that sustainability.
3. A large group’s purpose is focused on **evangelization**. Large = a catch all so we can invite and welcome and minister to ALL youth who attend and come our way. This creates an opportunity for parishes to encourage their youth to invite and bring friends along to youth gatherings. Evangelization is key! It’s reaching out to teens to invite them to our ministries.
4. Small Groups, when set up as supplemental to the ministry, grow out best from large group.
5. By being involved in the large group and small group setting, it sends the message to teens that your faith is lived out in the **multiple communities** of faith of which each of us are a part.

Let’s look at it with the concept of the 4 C’s – Setting up our core team/adult volunteers and therefore our large and small groups like this will help us **both evangelize AND disciple teenagers.**

**Level 1: Contact (everyone)**

We can **engage every teen** at this level, regardless of who they are or how you know them. At this level, we let the teens know that we are interested in them and see them as a person of worth and importance. Some hints for making contact with teens:

1. Introduce yourself. Don’t wait for them to initiate the conversation.
2. Make eye contact.
3. Ask their name and remember it!
4. Reach out to all teens, not just the ones who dress and act in “appropriate” ways.
5. Be yourself.

**Level 2: Connect (most)**

Although we can make contact with all teens, we will connect with a smaller group. At this level,

we look for a common basis on which a relationship can grow. The reality is that we

cannot and will not connect with every teen in our program. But hopefully there is someone

that every teen can connect with. Some hints for connecting with teens:

1. Ask questions. This shows interest in their lives and helps you know what you have in common.
2. Meet them where they are. Take another Core and go to their games, plays, lunches, workplaces, etc.
3. Involve them in the planning and execution of youth gatherings, skits, videos, etc.
4. Be available. Never be too busy to take time to connect with a teen

**Level 3: Care (some)**

At this level, we know about the teens and we begin to give specific and individual attention. You know something about their lives, and there is trust and respect between you and these teens. Again, we will not be able to reach this level with all teens, but it is important that all the teens in our program are cared for by someone. Some hints for relating to teens in this level:

1. Actively listen to them. When they talk, give them your undivided attention. Listen to what is being said beyond the words.
2. Ask open-ended questions that draw the conversation to a more real level.
3. Earn the right to be heard. Your good advice and preaching will not be accepted if you have not gained their trust and respect.
4. If possible, meet their parents.
5. Be willing to share your experience, your faith, and even some of your mistakes with the teens.
6. Ask for their prayer requests and let them know that you are specifically praying for them.

**Level 4: Challenge (a few)**

Our ministry may only reach this level with a couple of teens, but it is here that we have the potential to directly influence a life. It is these relationships that give our ministry purpose and life. At this level we have gained the trust of the teens and have earned the right to be heard. It is a privilege and honor that demands an investment of our time and energy. Some hints for working with teens at this level:

1. Ask questions that challenge assumptions and behaviors.
2. Be ready for their questions. If you don’t know the answer, learn it together.
3. Speak the truth even when it is difficult. Don’t sugarcoat it.
4. Pray with them.
5. Challenge them in leadership roles. Provide opportunities for them to step up as leaders in the program.

When we view the workflow of how we are able to welcome and teens in the large group setting, we see the benefits of how we can connect and evangelize and invite in *more* teens very well! We can certainly appreciate once all core members have CONTACT with teens, to move forward in CONNECTING certain teens with good matches of core members. From there, the workflow allows for us to have teens who with the right fit and desire to go deeper in their faith, join a small group. And a few years later to watch that teens get to know others in the large group setting and eventually becoming a small group leader for peer ministry or junior high. Win win!

**Again, Small and Large Groups are complementary to each other. They need each other, and they can benefit and thrive because of the other!**

Questions?

Sarah Gavin

Wisconsin Life Teen Area Contact and Youth Minister for the Quad-parishes of Sturgeon Bay

920-743-4716

[stgavin25@gmail.com](mailto:stgavin25@gmail.com)