



Building Sustainable Youth Ministries...One Church at a Time

www.YMArchitects.com

5229 Cochran Drive Nashville, Tennessee 37220 (877) 462-5718

Frequently Asked Questions about Family-Based Youth Ministry, by Mark DeVries

Family-Based Youth Ministry (FBYM) is about accessing the God-designed structures of the nuclear family and the extended family of the church to help young people grow toward mature Christian adulthood.

1. How do I get started with a FBYM?

Most people confuse the starting of a family-based youth ministry with a radical change in programming. But the truth is that those who implement these principles without radically changing their program find that they meet much less resistance.

It is therefore recommended that churches seeking to begin a family-based youth ministry simply begin experimenting with one family-based program at a time, until something clicks. For example, you might try a prayer partner or mentoring program. You might try a parent/youth Sunday School class for a few weeks, or you could sponsor a parent training event. These would be done along with your regular programming.

2. What does your youth staff look like?

The youth staff at First Presbyterian Church of Nashville features Mark DeVries as the Pastor for Youth and Their Families. He is charged with the primary mission of casting the vision and empowering the staff and volunteers, in addition to teaching.

There is also a Youth Program Coordinator, who handles the day-to-day management of the ministry. There are two, full-time youth directors, charged with the mission of engaging 100 percent of the students under their care. There is a Director of College Ministries and a youth secretary on staff, as well. During the summer, 10 part-time interns (college students) are added to the staff.

3. Do you still run a Family Based Youth Ministry in your church?

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- *design sustainable, deep-impact youth ministries, one church at a time,*
- *build the competence, joy, and longevity of professional youth workers, and*
- *construct bridges to the best youth ministry resources available today.*

Absolutely! Now, if you look at our regular programming, you'd probably come away saying, "Hey, that looks like an average, ordinary, garden variety youth ministry. What's so 'family-based' about that?"

The truth is that FBYM is not about what the programming looks like. It's about what you use the programming for. And we try to point as much of our programming as possible in the direction of giving kids and adults excuses to interact together – whether it's CRUD day or Sunday School. We don't do a lot of "family-based" promotion. Instead we just do it, providing a foundation of an extended Christian family for our children and youth.

4. How do you structure your volunteers?

This is a long one....

We have used a variety of volunteer structures over the years. The most significant was when we moved from Junior High/High School structure to a grade-level structure. For each class we appointed a team leader, a Sunday School teacher, and Bible Study leaders.

Over the years, this structure didn't provide the care our students fully required. So we began to recruit enough volunteer leaders to provide one adult for every five students. The adults agreed to be in touch with their students weekly.

Each class has the following in place now:

- 1. Honcho- person in charge of volunteers, class communication and teachers*
- 2. Class Coordinator- person who organizes events*
- 3. COWs – "Cloud of Witnesses" (a la Hebrews 12:1) adult leaders in charge of five students each*
- 4. Bible Study Leaders- lead weekly meetings*
- 5. Prayer Partners- one adult matched with each student, so that entire youth group is prayed over*

5. How big is your youth group?

We have 400 students on the rolls.

We have 220 students who participate regularly.

6. How do I get great volunteers?

There is good news and bad news: The good news is that you CAN get great volunteers. The bad news is that you CAN'T do it quickly. In my experience, most people make three mistakes in recruiting vols:

- 1. Asking for too much. Volunteers can do a ton, but few will commit to take over your youth program right out of the barrel. I like to ask brand new leaders to be responsible*

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for things like attending Sunday School, handle registration for a party, drive the bus on the ski trip, etc. When adults have success in small jobs, they are more eager to say “yes” to big jobs.

2. Asking for too little. In our program, we ask for a six-year commitment from all leaders (or until the grade they are serving has graduated from high school). The truth is, most who are willing to make two-year commitments are just as willing to make it for six years.

3. Asking too late. Most start recruiting a couple of months before a leader is needed. But that’s not good enough. You should pick your “dream team” and plan on taking four years to get them in place. I have discovered that leaders that I want the most are always committed to other things the first time I ask them....but I just keep coming back. Nobody has told me no more than eight times!

7. How does FBYM look in a church setting?

At our church, we have seven activities each year that are intentionally family-based:

- 1. Fall Kick Off – bringing parent, youth leaders and students together on a Sunday morning for worship, food and orientation to year’s activities.*
- 2. Prayer Partner Banquet – celebrating the match between each student and one adult who prays for them regularly.*
- 3. Youth Sunday – when teenagers lead worship and are surrounded by the COWs (see question #4)*
- 4. Pancake Supper – raising money for summer mission trips by allowing the students to serve the church.*
- 5. Parent-Youth Sunday School Classes – taking three weeks each year for students to sit with parents in grade-level SS classes*
- 6. Senior Banquet – allowing parents of seniors to collect letters of blessing and to offer a verbal blessing during dinner celebration*
- 7. CRUD Day – initiating new seventh graders in May with an event where there are 150+ adults involved.*

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