

I'M STARTING A YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY. WHAT'S FIRST?

"My pastor just asked me to lead the young adult group at my church! I'm excited, and terrified. Where do I start?"

"No one is reaching young adults at my church. I want to do it. What can I do?"

"I feel called to reach my generation. What advice would you give me to start?"

Over the last twenty years, I've had these conversations numerous times. Starting ministry to young adults can be daunting. Children and youth ministry strategies are well documented. There are hundreds of resources to pull from. But there aren't many for young adult ministry.

Even though it's difficult, you can do it! Your church can do it! If God has placed this in your heart, He has a plan. While it is important to establish the values and principles for *why* we do young adult ministry, if you are reading this, I assume you already have that covered. Instead, I want to help you with some practical first steps to help you launch the ministry.

STEP 1: Make Five Lists

Yep, get a piece of paper and a pen and then make some lists (Okay, get your iPad, nobody uses pens and paper anymore).

List 1: Who are our current young adults?

Write down the names of all young adults already in your church. Get help from your pastor and others. If your church has a database system, use it. Don't worry if they are involved in another ministry or only come sporadically. Just make the list.

List 2: What is our church already doing with young adults?

Don't write "nothing!" You might be surprised to learn that you already have young adults who are involved. Go back through the first list and identify where they are connected. List both the formal and informal connections. You might discover your church may not have a targeted ministry to young adults, but it does have young adults in ministries. Are young adults serving as small group leaders or Sunday School teachers? Are they on the worship team? Do they go to one class or small group? Do they eat together after church? You might have an organic group of young adults ready to be mobilized.

List 3: What does your church leadership want to develop?

This is critical for what you do next. Make sure you know the expectations of your leaders. What is your assignment? Is it to grow the church by evangelizing young adults in the community? Are you focusing on keeping your current young adults? Are you supposed to start a Sunday School class, small group, or a distinct young adult service? If the answer to all those questions is yes, then narrow down what you want to

accomplish. When you know your assignment, you'll know the direction to take to fulfill that assignment. You'll be able to measure success. Make sure both you and your church leaders are on the same page. There is nothing worse than achieving *your* goal, only to find out it wasn't *their* goal.

List 4: Who is on your team?

You'll need several people to launch a young adult ministry. Make sure you have young adults from List 1 on this team. Young adults need to be ministered *with*, not just ministered *to*. Get as many young adults as possible on this team. If possible, I like to start with the number five (notice the five lists!). Five people is a good size team to manage and lead. What if we only have five young adults to start with? No problem, use those five as leaders to start your group. Let them be involved in the development and implementation.

List 5: What is going to happen for the next six months?

After your team is in place, you know your assignment, you have the blessing of your leaders, then build a six-month game plan. The president of the United States maps the first one hundred days in office. Most NFL football teams script the first quarter of plays they run. You should do the same. Plan what you'll do for the next six months and include all the steps of executing the plan. Some weeks, you'll have more to do than others, but do something every week. Start small and build. Be realistic and committed to the long haul. Too many groups do a bunch of activities at the start, wear themselves out, and then months pass before they do anything else. Sustained growth is better than a flurry of activity.

STEP 2: Change the Way You Eat (Spend Time with Young Adults)

This isn't diet advice; its ministry advice. Never eat alone. Every Sunday possible, have a young adult come to your home for lunch or dinner, or go out to eat with young adults. Get coffee with them on campus. When you go shopping, take someone with you. Doing things together is how you build relationships. It will be tempting (and honestly faster) to do things on your own. *Don't!* Include people to be with you. I can't think of the last time a week went by that I wasn't eating with a young adult.

STEP 3: Work with Your Church Leaders

It is essential that your church leadership knows what you are doing. Don't expect them to come to every activity, but they should know about every activity *in advance*. If you are a volunteer, make sure you know your church's policies for building use, church calendar, etc. Never compete with other church events. Don't schedule a retreat that pulls people out of the weekend service. Don't have a big party on an important ministry night. Work together with the other areas of the church to complement, not compete. It is important to interface with youth ministry as much as possible. These students will form the base of the future young adult ministry. Make sure you are coordinating with youth ministry to prepare for their transition.

STEP 4: Leverage Existing Opportunities

When you start, make sure you leverage every opportunity. Use existing church activities to become mini young adult events. At our annual Christmas events, young adults attend together, serve in the same ministry area together, and turn it into an event. It's creative rebranding of what the church is already doing. Ask yourself: What is our church doing? Where can we leverage and include young adults? What does our community do? What events are happening in our city, our denominational structure? Are there concerts coming that we can go to together? Be open and willing to be creative and flexible.

STEP 5: Have Fun *and* Learn about Jesus!

Over the years, I've seen groups binge on one of two extremes: having fun or spiritual development. Don't get me wrong, both are important. However, make sure you have a healthy balance in your schedule. Usually, whatever the focus of the leaders is, the group takes on that focus. If you love Bible study, deep questions, and theology, you'll skew to this and neglect relational activities. If you are more of a "let's have fun" person, you'll skew that way. It takes both. Don't neglect one for the other.

You can start a young adult ministry. Start with your existing young adults, get on the same page with your church leaders, leverage meals and activities, and have a lot of fun together learning about Jesus!