

Youth Ministry Events as Faith Formation Part Three

Processing Events and Connecting to Daily Life

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Outline for Youth Ministry Events as Faith Formation Part Three:

1. Parts One and Two Training Review (5 minutes)
2. Section One: Processing the Experience (55 minutes)
 - a. Hand-Holding
 - i. Participate
 - ii. Listen
 - b. Finger-Pointing
 - i. WHEAT Activity
 - ii. Scenario Activity
 - iii. Helpful Resources
3. Section Two: Connecting Events and Experiences to Daily Life (30 minutes)
 - a. How do we do this?
 - b. Small Group Discussion
4. Section Three: Managing Your Group During Events (30 minutes)
 - a. Cell Phones
 - b. Transportation
 - c. Lodging
 - d. Food
 - e. Group Management

Supplies needed for this session:

- PowerPoint/LCD Projector/Screen/Laptop
- Pens/Pencils
- Paper
- Handouts:
 - Appendix One: WHEAT Cards
 - Appendix Two: Scenarios
 - Appendix Three: DRAGG

Spring and Fall Training Review *(5 Minutes)*

Reviewing the Topic of Confronting Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

At the start of this 3 part training, we shared with attendees the findings of the National Study on Youth and Religion and the Exemplary Youth Ministry Study. One of the primary findings from this study is that youth believe in God. This seems like good news...until we also learn that what they believe about God is a watered down version of Christianity the study calls Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. This “creed” that youth (and adults) believe in is primarily about being happy and doing good. It’s a belief system that is all about us and our needs, and depends largely on us – what we do and how we feel. It is a cultural faith that has hints of Christianity, and might sound good on the surface...but it does not take into consideration a broken world in need of a savior, and does not reflect a God who is intensely personal and will stop at nothing to come to us, wherever we are.

What we are after in these training sessions is to deconstruct MTD in the lives of youth. We want to make sure that the events we offer – whether it’s a one-time fundraiser or a week long mission trip - strip away the cultural understanding of faith and challenge youth to experience Jesus Christ through authentic relationships and experiences that are rooted in sound theology and faith practices.

In the first session of this training, we talked about the purpose of events: deciding what type of events to offer based on the needs of your young people, what type of adults are needed to walk alongside young people.

The second training session looked at how you prepare your group for an event: how you make sure your event gets you where you want to go, how you evaluate an event to make sure you got there, and the preparation and logistics needed to get you ready to go...whether it’s for that one time fundraiser or weekend retreat.

If you missed the first two training sessions, we encourage you to go online to watch them. We might refer to some of what was taught, but the first two are not a prerequisite for getting something out of this one!

What we will be talking about today is how we help our groups experience the work of the Holy Spirit in the midst of an event, and how we help them connect an event to their daily life.

Section One: Processing the Experience During an Event *(55 Minutes)*

Events are opportunities for young people to disengage from the world around them so they can fix their eyes on Jesus Christ. Events take youth - and adults - out of our comfort zone, so we can see the world and ourselves from Christ's point of view rather than our own. For transformation to take place we have to be intentional to make time during an event to reflect on what we are experiencing, learning and feeling. Otherwise the event becomes a blip on our faith journey and will be forgotten by the time we get home. Or worse, we inadvertently teach that faith happens only at the "mountaintop" event (or at church, or in the church bus), not in our daily lives. *(Adapted from Chapter 8 of Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church, by Kenda Creasy Dean.)*

In the Part Two training, we talked about the purposes of event ministry and discussed how to make an event a transforming experience for the participants. There were a few key factors in determining this: audience, goals, and evaluation.

Today we are going to focus on ways that you can make the goals that you set for an event happen during the event. We will also talk about how to connect what was learned at an event with participant's daily lives, and how to share what was experienced at an event with those who were not able to participate in the event. In our first section today, we will focus on **during** the event.

Ron Foster and Kenda Creasy Dean, in their book The Godbearing Life, share a chapter entitled "Hand-holding and Finger-pointing." They tell a story about a mother walking across a park one day with her young child, holding her hand and, on occasion, stopping to point things out to the little girl. This becomes a metaphor for spiritual direction as they write:

"Spiritual direction often is considered one of the practices of communion, since the ultimate objective is not to offer moral instruction or pastoral care. The goal of spiritual direction is reaching toward oneness with God by discerning God's direction for our daily lives." *(pp. 139-140)*

Hand-holding, then, becomes ministry of presence and finger-pointing ministry of direction.

If we use this metaphor as we think about how to process events with youth, our goal should not be to tell them how to be transformed, but to open up a conversation in the midst of presence, perhaps pointing a few things out for them as we listen and participate with them.

Hand-Holding

Participate:

One skill needed for hand-holding is to participate with young people. Let's look at what this means.

Participation is active:

- Experience the event fully
 - If there are games, play with the youth, sing, be willing to look a little silly so that the youth will let down their guard.
 - Participate in discussion – but don't dominate (a good rule of thumb is to allow 2-3 youth share before you do).
 - Be open to learning with them.
- Observe what's going on with the youth
 - Who is talking, who is not, read body language
 - Who are the leaders, who is following
 - What are their aha moments, talk about those with them one-to-one later if possible
 - Try to draw out and include youth who may seem distracted or left out.
- Translate your experience into a story to share
 - Pay attention to your own experience as you participate.
 - How is this experience impacting your faith life?
 - How can you share appropriately your own experience with the youth as you later process together?

Participation is genuine:

- Expect to be transformed yourself
- Be who you are
 - Participation may be hard or awkward sometimes...this is OK. Have a little fun with that, turn it into a positive example of how to learn and grow even when you are uncomfortable.
 - Don't try to participate in the ways the youth do if it isn't you...figure out ways to participate as who you are!

Participation is complicated:

- Having fun with youth is not just a vacation or fun time
 - Think about what we have just discussed. It is difficult to participate, observe others, and grow yourself all at the same time. But this is what we are called to do. This takes energy, enthusiasm, concentration and authenticity!
 - Full participation and observation is HARD WORK!

Listen:

Another skill in hand-holding is listening.

Listening is active:

- Listen with your ears
 - The first part of listening is to actually hear the person.
 - Location can be key to ensuring that you can hear the speaker.
- Listen with your eyes
 - Face the speaker if appropriate and/or comfortable (face to face is ideal, but some people may be more comfortable side to side...keep this in mind; face to face can also be very intimate, so be sure to allow for appropriate physical space as you set this up).
 - Whether face to face or side to side, be sure your eyes are focused on the person, that you make appropriate eye contact, and that you are not wandering around with your eyes becoming or looking distracted.
- Listen with your body
 - Lean in to the conversation.
 - Keep body movements to a minimum.
 - Consider what your body position communicates.
 - For example, do your crossed arms appear withdrawn or defensive?
- Respond with clarifying questions to dig further
 - Don't just read between the lines or assume; clarify meaning by asking further questions.
 - Ex. I heard you say _____. Did you mean _____?
 - Use questions to draw out more information from the person.
 - Ex. So you are from San Antonio? How long have you lived there? What is your favorite part of the city?
 - Remember that the focus is on your listening, and not always your response.

Listening is genuine:

- Listen because you care
 - It will be noticed by the listener if you are not really interested in what they have to say.
- Be open to what questions youth are asking
 - Try to respond to shocking, accusatory, or otherwise difficult questions with a calm, considerate manner.
 - Know what your buttons are and be aware to not take questions or comments personally.
 - Think on, or ask about, the reason behind the question or statements being made.
 - What we hear is not always the whole story.

Listening is a discipline:

- Part of listening well is hearing what is being said
- Part of listening well is “hearing” what is not being said
 - Sometimes we can learn much about what’s going on when we notice what the speaker is not saying out loud whether by omission, body language, emotional response.
- Listening is stopping and focusing on the speaker
 - Our first tendency is often to jump to response or advice, but many times, we just need to listen and be with the speaker’s experience
- Listening is HARD WORK!
 - To listen well, you must hear, interpret, question, and involve your whole body. This is not easy work...it can be very draining to listen actively and listen well.

Finger-Pointing

- Ask good questions
 - Ask open-ended questions as you process events
 - Open ended questions require more than a yes/no answer.
 - Open ended questions tend to start with how, where, what, when.
 - Be careful of why questions...they can often put people on the defensive. Think about how you might word the question rather than starting with the word why.
 - Listen for answers that lead to more questions
 - Ex. What is your favorite job at the work site? Painting. What do you like about that activity? (The answer to this question may then even lead you

to more if you find commonality or something you would like to hear more about...)

- Make observations
 - Remember that you have been an active participant, so be sure to point out the things you noticed yourself, as well as with others.
 - What did you see, hear, feel, think? What did you notice about others?
 - Combine observations with questions, to help participants discover how they are being transformed.
 - Ex. I noticed when we were painting the elderly woman's house that you always had a smile on your face. What were you feeling while we were working today?
- Point to Jesus
 - Where is Jesus in all this?
 - The point is to connect all our experiences (and specifically the events we participate in) to our life of faith...don't forget to connect and share those connections with others!
 - Ex. How did you see Christ today while you were painting? Everyone was working together, taking time for each other, helping each other. Where do you see Christ in this same way at home? At school?

Listening and Questioning Activity (20 minutes)

To help us practice listening and questioning skills we are going to use a tool from the Peer Ministry Leadership Training. Peer Ministry Leadership is a highly effective training curriculum that equips youth and adults with communication and leadership skills to for relational ministry in their church, school, homes and community. You can learn more about Peer Ministry Leadership at the website listed on the card we just gave you (www.peerministry.org).

Give each participant a WHEAT card (see Appendix 1).

The activity we are going to do uses the acronym WHEAT as a tool to start conversations, and as a prompt when you get stuck in conversations to know what to ask next.

- **W = Where** (where are you from, where do you live, etc)
- **H = Hobbies** (what are your interests, what do you do in your spare time, etc)
- **E = Event** (why are you at this event, what brought you to this event today)
- **A = Acquaintances** (who do you know)
- **T = Travel** (where have you been, what places have you seen)

These questions can be helpful as you get to know a person. They are open ended questions that can provide information leading to further questions or information.

For our first activity, you will practice your listening AND questioning skills by using this acronym, WHEAT. When I am done giving instructions you will break into groups of three. One person in the group will ask the questions and listen, the second person will answer the questions, and the third person will serve as an observer. The person asking questions may or may not need to utilize all the letters of the acronym. The point of the activity is for the listener/questioner to get to know the speaker and practice furthering conversation by asking questions, in addition to practicing listening skills. The observer's job is to take notes of how the listener is doing, paying attention to the ways in which they asked the questions (i.e. their tone, body language, etc .) and also how well they listened actively (body language, eye contact, all the components we discussed earlier.) You will have 5 minutes as the listener/questioner. It is important for the listener/questioner to keep up this role for the duration of the 5 minutes. When I call time you will switch roles. We will do this 3 times so every person has an opportunity to experience each role.

After each person has had an opportunity to be in the listener/questioner role, take 5 minutes to share the observations you made.

Processing Events and/or Experiences: Practice with Scenarios (20 minutes)

Split the group into partners or groups of three. Give each group a few scenarios from youth events to “practice processing”. (See Appendix 2) Allow each group time to run through at least two or three scenarios, determining ways to process what has happened. Have them consider how they could be present within the scenario, what they should be looking for or observing, and how they might “finger-point” in this situation...i.e. what might they point out, what questions might they ask, etc. Then have groups join back together and share what kinds of questions and/or approaches they found helpful.

Helpful resources to suggest for follow up:

- Peer Ministry Leadership Training: www.everyday-everywhere.org. This is a highly effective leadership training for youth and adults, providing caring communication and relational ministry skills.
- How to Ask Great Questions: Guide Your Group to Discovery With These Proven Techniques by Karen Lee-Thorp
- **DRAGG** : A common acronym helpful when formally processing activities with youth is DRAGG: (See Appendix Three)

Section Two: Connecting Events and Experiences to Daily Life (30 Minutes)

Significant research and study has been done over the last fifteen to twenty years in attempts to figure out what transforming youth ministry actually looks like. For this portion of our training today, we can look to two findings that the Exemplary Youth Ministry study has produced, in conjunction with other studies and research.

First, “the entire congregation makes a difference in youth ministry.” (p. 83 EYM)

This means that the events our youth take part in will be most effective if we not only involve the youth and adults who participate with them, but the whole congregation on some level.

Second, “of parents who report that their faith is extremely important in their daily lives, 67% of their teens report that faith is extremely or very important in their daily lives; only 8% of those parents’ teens report that faith is not very or not important in their lives.” (p. 171, EYM cited from NSYR) And, parents who report that faith is not important also have teens who believe the same thing. All this to say that parents make a difference in the faith lives of their teenagers.

This means that the events our youth take part in will be most effective if we also involve the parents of the youth, and give parents opportunities to grow in faith, as we strive to have maximum impact on the transforming effect of these events.

How do we do this?

Youth ministry events range in scope and activity level from weekly Bible studies to week-long mission trips and connecting these events and experiences to daily life is more than just telling the congregation and parents about your travels afar. At this time, we will go over some ideas for connecting events and experiences, and then you will have an opportunity in groups to discuss some ideas you have used too!

1. ***Set goals for how your events can be transforming.*** (Setting goals for events was a part of the Fall 2011 Training and can be reviewed in video form online!) How do these goals match up with your overall ministry goals for your youth?
 - a. What kind of goals would you have for a weekly Bible study?
 - i. How can the youth apply their learning to the rest of their week?
 - ii. How can you communicate to youth what this might look like in daily life?
 1. Because what your goals are **MUST** be communicated!
 - b. What kind of goals would you have for a summer trip?
 - i. What are your goals for the trip?

- ii. What are your goals for how this experience will translate into what the youth do every day?
- iii. How can you encourage youth to continue living their experience when they get home? What can they DO when they are not on the youth trip anymore to carry over at least some of what they have learned, or experienced?

2. How do you communicate with parents about what was experienced?

- a. You can never communicate in enough ways!
 - i. Set up a youth ministry website...upload pictures regularly
 - ii. Provide examples or outlines of your weekly Bible study for parents
 - iii. Have regular parent meetings or lunches
 - iv. Newsletters, bulletin inserts, etc.
 - v. There are many other ways...these are just a few!
 - vi. Email or blog while on a trip (don't forget to journal too!)
 - vii. Send letters or postcards while on a trip
- b. Involve the parents in your event somehow
 - i. For events at home, invite parents to participate, i.e. cook meals, lead a game, bring snacks (with emphasis on bring and not just send along!)
 - ii. Have an interactive blog where parents can ask questions and make comments while you are on a trip.
 - iii. For trips, involve parents in fundraising opportunities, planning events, sending services, etc.
- c. Create activities for families to do together that support or extend the goal of your event
 - i. Send service ideas that relate to your topic home for students to do with their parents.
 - ii. Provide daily devotional materials that reflect the lessons learned at Bible study.

3. How do you share your events with the congregation?

- a. Worship
 - i. Have youth give a sermon on the lessons they have learned through an event or series of events.
 - ii. Prepare a slide show to highlight experiences, especially trips and larger events, but don't forget to record weekly or monthly events to share with the congregation so they know your ministry is not just about the one week trip in the summer, or VBS!

- b. Written communication
 - i. Prepare short paragraphs or inserts for the Sunday bulletin
 - ii. Write articles for the newsletter
- c. Visual images around the church
 - i. Bulletin boards, pictures, etc.
- d. Involve congregational members in events
 - i. Have members other than parents provide meals or snacks
 - ii. Invite members to share gifts with the youth such as ballroom dancing, life skills such as sewing or car maintenance, biblical storytelling, life stories and faith stories they are willing to share.
- e. Congregational mentors/prayer partners
 - i. You could use these throughout the year, for special trips, or both!

4. *How you will intentionally share your event experiences with youth who could not attend?*

- a. Storytelling with purpose
 - i. Have a dinner and story/picture sharing night when you return from a trip, or at the conclusion of a school year or Bible study series, etc.
 - ii. Share stories with the youth who could not attend, particularly stories of transformation.
 - 1. Have the youth who experience great change through events learn how to tell those stories of faith by sharing with other youth.
 - 2. Share the “family stories” with youth who could not attend as well. Treat them as a “remember the time when” as if you were sharing them with your family while sitting around the table with good friends too.
 - iii. Keep watch for “inside jokes” and stories that you need to explain for those who may have missed the event.
- b. Group building
 - i. Include youth who cannot attend an event in the group building phases of planning too.
 - ii. Continue to build the group after an event that takes place so as to include those who maybe couldn’t attend.
- c. Communicate while gone
 - i. Just as you communicate with parents while gone on a trip, communicate with the other youth too!
- d. Involve other youth, parents and congregation in planning before the event

- i. Fundraising
- ii. Covenanting
- iii. Prayer buddies/mentors

Small Group Discussion: (15 minutes)

Allow participants to break into groups of 4 to 5 people. Give groups about ten minutes to discuss ways they have connected events their youth have participated in to daily life, parents, the congregation, and youth who were unable to attend. Particularly have them think and answer the questions about goal setting for events as listed above. Encourage them to think about not only large events the youth have participated in, but smaller local events as well. Then have the groups pick their top 3 ideas/experiences to share with the larger group.

<p>Section Three: Managing Your Group During Events (30 Minutes)</p>

Some of the following ideas will apply only to trips, and some to local, but many will apply to both! Group management is not about making the rules and getting youth to follow them. Group management is planning so that the event will go smoothly and you have the best potential for transformation to take place. Jane Nelsen is quoted as saying, “When did we ever get the idea that to make children do better, first you have to make them feel worse?” Management isn’t about squelching negative behaviors as much as it is about planning so that those behaviors don’t even have a chance to show up.

Cell Phones:

- Will you allow cell phone during events?
- How will you monitor cell phone use so as not to distract from the group’s ability to “be present with each other”?
 - What boundaries will you set?
 - Off during weekly Bible study? Turned in at the door?
 - Only certain times while on trips? Not on the bus/car ride?
 - How will you handle misuse of phones?
- What is the church’s liability for a youth’s phone?
- What are expectations for adults?
- If cell phones allowed for safety, how will you manage their use for other issues?
- Cell phones are only one of many media devices available to participants. What other devices do you need to consider and address with the group?

Transportation:

- How big is the group and how will this affect your type/amount of transportation?
 - Bus, cars, vans?
- How will you separate the groups into vehicles?
 - Randomly?
 - Set seats or will/should you rotate group members from car to car to allow for different friendships to develop?
 - Do you have behavioral concerns to consider?
 - Physical concerns to consider?
- Will you/can you use the transportation time as group building time?
 - Group building games
 - Conversation questions
 - No phones, video games, etc?
- How will you get your group back to vehicles when they are supposed to be there?
 - Be specific about times (don't say "in 15 minutes", try saying "2:05")
 - How do you get the group on the bus/at meeting point on time (tell them 15 minutes earlier than they need to be there!)
- Who will drive?
- What are your safety concerns
- How much baggage can youth bring? What supplies do you need?

Lodging:

- Where will you (and other adults) sleep?
- What are sleeping arrangements?
- Safe haven/risk management policies

Food:

- How many meals?
- Where do you plan to eat?
 - How much time do you need based on the type of restaurant and number of people
 - Can you have food and snacks with you in the hotel? At the venue? Will you have to buy snacks and drinks?
 - Do you have food allergies in the group you need to plan for?
- Will you give food money allowances or pay as a group?

Group Management:

- Small groups with designated leaders
- Covenant issues
 - How will you manage behaviors?
 - What are the expectations of adults as well as youth?
- How many sponsors do you take?
- Come prepared with “back-up”
 - Always have extra materials for “just in case” such as a Bible and a few devotionals
 - Have games prepared for while waiting in lines (such as mental riddles, questions, etc)
 - Bring a pack of cards, a few dice, other small portable games
- Make a ministry opportunity
 - When faced with challenges like a flat tire, long line, missed appointment, poor directions, use it as an opportunity to bond with the group, or relate it to faith!
 - Pull out your “back-up”
 - Keep positive!
- Keeping track of your group
 - Small groups to meet and gather
 - Have a way to see each other above a crowd (like a sign on a stick)
 - Count heads

If time allows, give participants a few minutes to exchange ideas in small groups on tips and ways they have accomplished group management in the past.

Conclusion

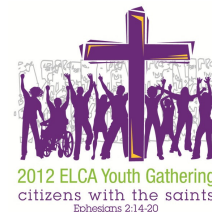
This concludes Part 3! I would again encourage you to check out the other two training sessions online if you missed them, or even for a quick refresher! I also encourage you to participate in the free, online webinar sessions on Lutheran Theology and effective youth ministry practices. You can download all of these at www.practicediscipleship.org.

Close in prayer.

Heavenly Father,

We are thankful for the opportunities we have to lead events and experiences for youth in our care. Help us to always be looking for ways in which we can help them connect what they do with us to their daily lives, to their family, to the congregation, and to the world in which we live. Guide us as we lead, AND as we participate with youth. Amen.

**This curriculum was developed for the Practice Discipleship Project, an initiative of the 2012 ELCA Youth Gathering (www.elca.org/gathering) in partnership with the ELCA Youth Ministry Network (www.elcaymnet.org). While primary authorship belongs to the author noted above, this is a collective work of the Practice Discipleship writing team: Shivon Miller (Trinity Lutheran Church, Duluth, MN), and Heather Hansen (Texas Lutheran University: www.tlu.edu). Permission is given to use these resources in your local context, so long as no organization or individual profits from the use of these materials.*



Appendix 2

Scenarios for Processing Practice:

Scenario One:

You have just left the Superdome after the evening Mass Gathering at the ELCA Youth Gathering. On the way to your hotel, you end up at a street corner with a person who has some type of mental illness. They are shouting obscenities at the cars that drive by, at people who pass, and even at a member of your group who stares at them just a moment too long. When you arrive at the hotel, you meet with the group for the “Final 15” end-of-the-day conversation. Practice how you might use the situation on the street corner as a teachable moment. How would you process it? What questions do you ask? What observations might you make? What challenges or opportunities does the situation present?

Scenario Two:

You are meeting with your youth group for a weekly Bible study time. One of the activities you choose to use with the group is the human knot. In this activity, each person grabs the left hand of someone else in the circle with their right hand, and another person’s right hand with their left. The group must then untangle the knot that is created among the people in the circle. How might you process this activity? What questions would you ask? What observations might you make? What kind of faith tie-ins could you create with this activity, or the answers that are given?

Scenario Three:

Your group has committed to work at a soup kitchen one evening. While you are there, serving in the line with some of your youth, you notice several things:

- One of your youth sitting at a table immersed in conversation with one of the patrons
- Two patrons, a mother and pre-teen daughter, who seem very uncomfortable and out of place sitting and eating in a corner keeping to themselves
- The cook is a very happy and optimistic person
- Everyone responds to a smile when you give it to them

How do you process the time with the youth, and what do you point out of your own observations. How do you relate what you see to your spiritual life and that of the youth?

Scenario Four:

You have encouraged many of the youth in your congregation to take on roles in worship beyond acolyting, such as lay reading, assisting minister, and communion assistants. You have noticed, however, that most of the youth seem to do these things almost grudgingly without much enthusiasm. You want the group to understand the importance and privilege of serving in this way, rather than seeing it as a chore or burden. How do you process this with the group?

Appendix Three

DRAGG

D = Do something!

This is the actual playing of the game, group building exercise, participation in an event.

R = Reflect!

Do an instant “replay” of the activity. Ask the group to describe what they have just done. Appropriate questions would be: “What did we just do?”, “Where did we go?”, “How did we do it?”, “What tasks were done?”

A = Analyze!

Get the group to see what was happening to them as individuals, as well as the group while they were involved in the activity. “Why did these things happen?”, “Did you find out anything about yourself?”, “Did you learn anything new?”, “How do you feel about what we did or what happened?”, “Who were the leaders in the group?”, “How did you feel when _____?”

G = Generalize!

Help the group to see how the things they learned can help them where they live, work and play. Helpful questions might be: “How does this new idea or feeling fit in your life?”, “Can you do this at home?”, “How might this help you while living or working with people?”, “What does this say about us as a group?”

G = God-ify!

Lead the group to understand how this relates to their relationship with God. “How does this apply to your relationship with Christ?”, “How can you use what you learned here to help you grow closer to God?”, “Is there a Biblical story that we could relate to what just happened?”