

Choosing Programs for the Next Church Year

Most congregations begin fall program planning shortly after Easter. This is a good time to look at the resources online, order catalogs from publishers (see attached list) and gather information about the programs you used in the past year.

If you do not have specific committees or ministry teams that would normally do an annual review and program planning, pull together the leaders and representatives of the following groups:

- Rector and Assisting Clergy
- Wardens
- Church School Director and representative teachers
- Youth Ministry Coordinator and a couple of leaders if you have multiple groups
- Adult Education Group Leaders
- Outreach Ministry Coordinator or representatives of groups if there are several
- Pastoral Care Ministry Coordinator or representatives of groups if there are several
- Liturgical Ministry Coordinator or representatives of relevant groups
- Other appropriate leaders in your congregation

First Meeting: 2 hours

What we did

Begin by listing on newsprint all the “successes,” the things that worked well, the points where leaders sensed real energy. Do not allow the group to discuss these in detail or talk about what didn’t work. This is a time to focus on where you experienced growth (in numbers, in knowledge, in understanding, in compassion, in faith, etc.) and where you felt energy (people came on time, were enthusiastic, talked about the experience with others, invited others to join, etc.). This list is likely to be of events, groups, specific times when things went well. Post this list in a prominent spot.

What we accomplished

Now review the list you just generated and identify what goals were met. These may have been pre-established or “accidental” goals. If “we had a great Sunday School” is on your list, name what outcome makes you say that. It might be that it was “great” because the children learned a lot and enjoyed it. Or maybe because more families attended or attended more regularly. Those are goals or outcomes. What you want to do is name what you accomplished.

Remember to look beyond the obvious. For example, a J2A youth leader recently realized that in the past six years, the J2A program had engaged a new group of leaders who had become more involved in other aspects of church life after their tenure as youth leaders and that it had gotten the parents of youth more involved in the church. These were “accidental” goals—desirable outcomes but not the reason they started J2A.

What we hope to accomplish next year

When your goal list is finished, review it and identify which you hope to extend into the next year and which *new* goals you'd like to accomplish as well. If you made significant progress in one area, you may want to focus on an area where you see a greater need. Or, you may choose to build on your previous progress and extend it to the next level. As you engage in this process, remember to take your congregation's vision and mission into consideration.

Prepare for the next meeting

This is all your group will be able to accomplish in this time frame. Decide who will transcribe and distribute the newsprint within the next week. Distribute copies of the chart (below) to group members. Ask them to become familiar with the various programs and the primary purpose of each one (we've filled in some of what you will find at www.LeaderResources.org as examples) and to do some research on programs from other publishers, using the same format. Most importantly, ask the group to commit to daily prayer for guidance.

Second Meeting: 2

Match possible programs to goals

Review the goals your group named and invite the group to confirm, change, delete or add to them. Identify which programs match those goals. Review the programs you used last year and decide whether they remain the best for you or whether you want to consider changes. Identify possible new programs and decide which group or person would lead that program. Remember that most programs do not need more than one or two enthusiastic leaders and about six to eight participants. A "rule of thumb" is to have one adult program each week for every 25 adults attending your Sunday worship service(s)—include Saturday evening services if that is one of your "main" weekly services.¹

Select programs

At this point you may wish to divide into smaller groups. The Church School leaders can review church school curriculum, Vacation Bible School program, etc. The youth ministry leaders can review their program. Adult education leaders can focus on adult programs while the outreach ministry and pastoral care leaders can look at programs that might benefit their groups.

Meanwhile, the Wardens might talk about the vestry retreat and/or leadership training. Ask each small group to come prepared to describe and recommend a program, who would lead it, when it might occur and what benefit it would bring (i.e., what goal(s) it addresses).

Ask each small group to report on their discussion. Set aside those reports that need further discussion. Identify those things that seem clear and see if you can agree by consensus. For example, the Sunday School leaders may decide to use the same curriculum as it has worked well and the teachers like it. Or, the adult leaders may decide not to repeat an experience that didn't attract participation or, even if it did, it didn't accomplish any of the identified goals.

¹This assumes small groups of eight, so about one-third of your adults would be engaged in an adult education program on any given week. If you have a large group, the number of small groups might be fewer. Also remember that you can integrate faith formation into other activities, so Bible Study at the start of a Vestry or Outreach Committee meeting turns that event into a faith formation opportunity.

Just because people attend a program does not mean it is helping move the participants or the congregation forward. It may simply be the only option or people came because they feel they should or because they don't know there is anything else they could be doing and they come hoping for something. If you can't name a clear outcome that is desirable, it may be time to try something else.

Focus on selections needing more discussion

Now return to those proposals that need further discussion. Decide how you will proceed. You may want to work in smaller groups for the rest of the time. Or some members of this larger group may now be finished and choose not to continue with the large group. For example, if the Sunday School leaders like their curriculum and only need to decide which VBS program to use, they can work on that on their own once it is agreed that this is what you want to do. Make sure they are clear on who will recruit leaders, deal with budget issues, etc. and then send them on their way.

Decide

Decide on a process to make decisions on the remaining proposals. Make those decisions.

Prepare a report to give to the Vestry (if that is your norm). Include:

- all proposed programs for the next year (Sept. to Sept. or June to June)
- the goal(s) each program is designed to meet—the desired outcome
- who will be responsible for each program (what Committee or Ministry Team)
- who will lead each program and/or who will recruit/train leaders
- when will each program occur (start and end dates)
- where the groups will meet; any special requirements (space, furniture, equipment)
- what costs are covered by the budget and, if there are costs beyond the budgeted amount, how will those costs be covered (e.g., participant contributions)

This document, once agreed to and approved, will serve as your roadmap for the coming year. Your newsletter editor and publicity/communications team need a copy so they can tell the congregation about the programs for the next year. This communications process needs to begin in June or July and continue well into the fall and then pick up at least six weeks or two months before a new short-term group begins.

Implement your plan

Remind all group leaders that the best way to recruit participants is through personal invitation. Each group leader should personally invite enough people to have a viable group (six to eight people). If more people come, great. But if not, they have a viable group and can proceed.

Finally, establish who will support the group leaders, encourage them, thank them for their efforts, value the service they offer. This should be the responsibility of clergy, wardens, vestry or a designated group. It needs to be intentional and monitored, so leaders know they are appreciated and so they receive the kind of support they need to do the work you've asked them to do.

Goal or Outcome	LeaderResources Programs and Resources	Length/Duration
Children and Youth		
Children learn Bible, church concepts and values – even if they attend every other week or less.	WorkshopCycles -- Rotation workshop model curriculum with up to seven sessions per theme. Art, drama, music, story, kitchen, etc.	Multi-year
Children learn the entire Bible over time; easy for teachers (even inexperienced teachers)	Mustard Seed Series – systematic study of the Bible	K-9 th grade
Summer experience that will result in children having a good time and learning something about the faith—VBS	Aslan is On the Move! (<i>The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe</i>), Wizards and Wonders (Harry Potter) Dare to Be Different , (Madeleine L'Engle's <i>Wrinkle in Time</i>) Pilgrimage I & II (saints and sites), Praying All The Time , Peacable Kingdom (bullying), Wild Willy (Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory....watch for new ones.	Most have 5 sessions; can use serially, in one week (VBS) or over a weekend
Provide lectionary-based children's worship	Come and Worship (lessons, psalm, sermon notes)	Years A, B, C
Youth program that integrates youth into the life of the church, provides spiritual formation, rites of passage, pilgrimage.	Journey to Adulthood* (J2A)	Six years: ages 11-18
Youth program that addresses young people's needs and interests Or Lectionary-based program that connects youth with lessons in church	GodTalks! – topics covering many subjects to choose from Making it Real and Relevant – uses music and movies	Three+ years Three years
Enrich the Epiphany season	Let it Shine! (for all ages)	All weeks in Epiphany
Learn basic beliefs of the Episcopal Church	Catechism Curriculum (for children, youth and adults)	Year-long
Provide Sunday School teachers and liturgy planners with seasonal resources	Multiple book and e-books with lessons, activities, worship resources and graphics	Multiple lengths

Goal or Outcome	LeaderResources Programs and Resources	Length/Duration
Adult Education		
Develop potential youth group leaders for J2A	<i>The Adult Journey</i>	25 sessions; can be divided
Provide parents of middle school children and teenagers with experience and skills that will help them as parents	<i>The Adult Journey</i>	25 sessions; can be divided
Help adults understand different perspectives on the authority of Scripture	<i>Who Says So?</i>	5 sessions which may be divided
Develop an understanding of ethical principles	<i>Do The Right Thing</i> (case studies by and for older adults)	1 intro session 20+ cases
Learn how to discuss controversial issues	<i>Love One Another</i>	1 intro session + as many sessions as
Learn how underlying beliefs shape public policy and culture	<i>Beyond Belief</i>	7 skill sessions + as many as desired on
Spirituality		
Deepen spiritual life	<i>Living in Community</i> (formerly Adult Journey II) <i>Teach Us to Pray</i> (introduction to 22 ways to pray)	25 sessions 22 individual sessions, 3 parts or year-long
Develop a deeper understanding of the Eucharist	<i>Lift Up Your Hearts!</i> (Includes instructed Eucharist; can be used as individual session on topics)	21 sessions
Enrich Lenten experience	<i>Journey to Easter</i> (program + stations artwork) <i>Create in Us a New Heart</i> (program, meditations, children's	Season of Lent

Goal or Outcome	LeaderResources Programs and Resources	Length/Duration
Lay Ministry		
Meet pastoral care needs in small faith groups	<i>Discipleship Groups</i>	12 initial sessions; ongoing
Support/train pastoral care givers	<i>In the Time of Trouble</i>	8 sessions; can be ongoing
Strengthen outreach ministry	<i>Building Advocacy Skills</i>	Weekend retreat or over several meetings
Involve laity in marriage preparation Develop a marriage ministry in our congregation	<i>Mentoring the Marriage Journey</i>	4 skill sessions, 10 content sessions, 1 closing session
Train new Lay Eucharistic Ministers Provide ongoing support for LEM's Teach congregation about Lay Eucharistic Ministry	<i>Lay Eucharistic Ministers</i> (three programs: 1) training, 2) refresher for LEMs and 3) adult education	Training: 2 separate days Refresher: 8 sessions Education: 8 sessions
Leadership & Congregational Development		
Increase church membership	<i>The Adult Journey</i> (when used to draw in "drop off" parents) <i>Discipleship Groups</i> <i>Open Doors: Inviting Families to Church</i>	25 sessions 12 initial sessions; ongoing Year-long
Develop leadership skills Identify potential new leaders	<i>Discipleship Groups</i> (small group training process) <i>More Excellent Way</i> (vestry and/or key leaders) <i>Authentic Leadership</i> (leadership in church, work, etc.) <i>LifeCycles*</i> (for Mutual Ministry Team; available as a separate Program Membership)	25 sessions 3 day intensive 27 sessions 36 Sessions/Cycle; 3 Cycles; ongoing
Have a productive Vestry Retreat	<i>Vision, Mission, Planning, Team Building, Facing Change</i>	Friday night/Sat. or one-day retreats
Develop a vision for the congregation or a group	<i>Building a Vision</i>	1 day or overnight retreat
Create a mission statement	<i>Developing a Mission Statement</i>	1 day or overnight retreat
Learn and implement an ongoing planning process Establish a system to plan and make adjust monthly	<i>Dynamic Strategic Planning</i>	1 day or overnight retreat
Strengthen clergy/lay team	<i>Team Building</i>	1 day or overnight retreat
Help leaders face change	<i>Facing Change</i>	
Develop a Mutual Ministry Team to lead congregation	<i>LifeCycles*</i>	36 Sessions/Cycle; 3

Other:		