

New Year, New Opening Night Ideas

Craving new ways to kick off youth group? Are you tired of dispensing the same information in the same format from year to year? Here are a few ways to engage youth and their parents in study and play, get them excited about the upcoming year, and give all the important beginning-of-the-year details:

TRIVIA NIGHT

Make trivia night come alive for your youth group.

Rules: (1) Each table is assigned a judge (introduce them) and a color. There will be rounds of questions in the same categories. Each table team will have a few minutes to decide on an answer to each question and to write it on a strip of paper (in their color) and submit it to that table's specified judge. The judges will confer and give each team points based on the answer's accuracy. (2) The most accurate response is worth five points. Second place is worth three. But the team to hand their answer in first gets a point regardless of whether their answer is correct. Judges should note point value on each slip of paper and then on their more complete tally sheet. (3) At the end of each round of questions, two people from each table have to "tap out" and move to a different table to work with new people. Some rounds will be factual questions, but other rounds will be subjective. Table groups have to work together. **NO CHEATING:** consulting Google or web sources via smartphones is not allowed. Each table's judge can answer any clarifying questions. These same judges will be checking to ensure fair play on everyone's part.

Rounds: Each round of trivia should have a different category. Create trivia questions from the following categories: (insert name of church) history, energizer moves, Bible trivia, Disney trivia, name that tune, youth T-shirt designs, music trivia, etc. Be sure to end with a category titled "youth group expectations." This will help you lay the groundwork for building a covenant. Some prompts might be "List three things you would put on a group covenant" or "List three expectations of any youth group member" or "List three things you hope will happen in our youth group."

FAMILY FEUD

Use the popular game show *Family Feud* as a model for getting parents and youth to play together. Create some survey questions that will help you introduce topics on your opening night. Here are some sample surveys you can use as talking points to help dispense important beginning-of-the-year information:

Survey 1: Ways people find out what is going on at church: 20 word of mouth/other people, 19 Facebook/social media, 18 newsletter, 11 email, 9 bulletin, 8 announcements at church, 7 texts, 5 website, 3 church staff harassing them

Talking point 1: Let parents/youth know how you communicate (e-newsletter, social media, text, etc.).

Survey 2: Food most likely to be served at a church function: 34 fried chicken, 15 pizza, 12 deviled eggs, 13 casserole, 10 potato/pasta salad, 6 mac-n-cheese, 5 spaghetti, 5 lasagna

Talking point 2: Share how parents can help provide meals for youth group.

Survey 3: Reasons people give for going to camp: 33 friends, 18 fun/awesome, 17 to get away from family/parents, 10 my parents made me, 9 romance, 8 grow closer to God, 5 to be myself

Talking point 3: Give details and dates for summer trips.

Survey 4: Reasons people don't go to Sunday School: 26 sleep/too early, 19 sports, 14 it's boring, 12 too busy/overcommitted, 11 the topic, 7 the teachers, 6 friends don't go, 5 interferes with brunch/food

Talking point 4: Share Sunday School curriculum, introduce teachers, schedule, room numbers, etc.

Survey 5: Favorite Bible story/Scripture: 28 Noah's ark, 20 Christmas/Jesus' birth, 15 John 3:16, 10 Jonah, 9 Psalm 23, 8 creation, 5 Easter, 4 prodigal son, 3 good Samaritan

Talking point 5: Share Bible study opportunities.

Survey 6: Parents biggest concerns regarding their teenager(s): 35 making good choices/peer pressure, 22 drugs/alcohol, 11 safety, 9 good friends, 8 driving/car wrecks, 6 sex/dating, 5 dying, 4 character/manners/kindness

Talking point 6: Tell about how parents and youth leaders can work together. Do you offer a parenting class?

Survey 7: Reasons why students love their youth group: 34 friends, 19 can be oneself/acceptance, 15 fun activities/trips, 13 youth leaders/pastors, 8 family-like, 6 safe community, 3 food, 2 service/mission

Talking point 7: Share your excitement for the upcoming year.

Eat ice cream: After taking pictures of each ice-cream sculpture, allow students to split them into bowls for eating.

Discussion: Which team do you think best depicted a church? Why? Is there anything besides a building with a steeple that could have depicted a church? What makes a church a church? In Greek, the word for church can mean “assembly” or “congregation” or “belonging to or pertaining to Christ,” so a church is a gathering of people who belong to Christ. Youth group acts as a church and is part of our larger church, which is part of the universal church. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a vision for the central place of young people in the life of our church (see pcusa.org/vision-young-people for the full vision statement).

Close in prayer, thanking God for the wonderful treat, friends, church, and love that comes in many flavors and varieties.

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SURVIVOR NIGHT

Use the reality TV show *Survivor* as a model to get parents and youth thinking about what the kingdom of God is like. On this opening night, “The tribe has spoken” will take on a new meaning.

Tribal names: Have each group select one person to fetch the backpack. In each backpack, there will be items they need (duct tape, bandanas, face paint, beads, a copy of a parable, etc.). Each group must read the parable in their bag. They must create a tribe name based on the parable without using the title of the parable. Decorate each team member using the supplies in the backpack. One item in the backpack must be incorporated into each event.

Team challenges: Choose a few of these (or other) team challenges: (1) *Rubber band:* Tribe members join hands to form a recognizable shape determined by the game leader, without breaking hands. The first team to form the shape, wins. (2) *White water:* Each tribe forms their own line, sitting down, with pairs facing each other, their legs touching and their hands joined with the person across from them. They must then pass a shoe down the line and back on their joined hands without dropping it. If they drop it, they must begin again. (3) *The number cross:* Tribes must each take the cut-out numbers 1–8 and place them inside the outlined shape of a cross so that consecutive numbers are not touching vertically, horizontally, or diagonally.

God is like?: Explain that parables are stories that Jesus used to describe the kingdom of God and what God is like. Have tribes reread their parable. Ask each tribe to come up with an answer to this question: *If someone asked you what the kingdom of God is like, what would you say?* After each tribe shares, say, “The tribe has spoken.” Consider using this as an introduction for studying the parables.

Closing prayer: Ask that God would help group members be an example of God’s love to others, using words only when necessary. Being part of God’s tribe means living out God’s love and showing others what the kingdom of God is like.

ICE CREAM SOCIAL

Everyone loves ice cream! This activity is a great way to discuss what it means to be a church. Though we are using ice cream as a medium to express what the church looks like, we WILL eat the ice cream too!

Ice cream sculpting: Split youth into small groups of 4–6 students. Tell students that they will have three minutes to work as a team to sculpt their ice cream and toppings into a church. Be sure that each group has rubber gloves, plastic utensils, a half gallon of ice cream, sprinkles, syrup, and whipped cream.