CREATIVE CROWD-BREAKERS, MIXERS, & GAMES

CREATIVE RESOURCES FOR YOUTH MINISTRY

COMPILED BY WAYNE RICE & MIKE YACONELLI   EDITED BY YVETTE NELSON

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Part 3: Games

Introduction

Youth Ministry: Its Growth and Development

For the past twenty years, Catholic youth ministry has been in the process of critically re-examining its philosophy, goals, and principles. In part, this re-examination grew out of the perceived and felt needs of young people who will be the adults of the twenty-first century. In the early seventies—before youth ministry, as we know it, existed—those who worked with young people saw a need to experiment with new styles and forms of ministry with young people. Many parishes, schools, and dioceses began to develop youth ministries on the solid foundation of relational ministry and on the unique social and developmental needs of young people. Heretofore they had relied on the unquestioned process of presenting organizational, programmatic approaches such as weekly or biweekly classes, sports programs, or rarely, weekend or overnight retreats.

The new processes and approaches planted and tended during those years produced a renewed ministry with young people based on experience and insight. Leaders in the field of youth ministry discovered that ministry with young people must be a multifaceted, comprehensive, and coordinated effort. They rediscovered the age-old truth of Jesus' ministry: all ministry is rooted in relationships. Through the leaders' outreach and relationship building, young people began to experience the warmth of an accepting community, which is vital for the development of a comprehensive youth ministry. As relationships grew, a sense of belonging and participation also grew. The experience of acceptance, belonging, and participation opened young people so that they were able to reveal the needs and the concerns that preoccupied them. Programs developed around these needs and concerns: service projects, retreats, new forms of catechesis, peer ministry, prayer groups, celebrations of the sacraments. With these rediscovered opportunities for ministry, youth ministers were in a position to help young people grow personally and spiritually and find their place in the faith community as active Catholic Christians with a mission.

As the style of youth ministry changed, the traditional ministry to young people by the community evolved into a fourfold approach. Youth ministry was conceived not only in terms of responding *to* the unique social and developmental needs of young people but also in terms of adults' sharing a common ministry *with* young people, *by*

young people (especially involving their peers), and *for* young people (adults interpreting young people's legitimate concerns and acting as advocates for them). This fourfold understanding—to, with, by, and for—changed the style and broadened the scope of youth ministry.

In 1975 and 1976, hundreds of youth leaders from across the country consulted for fifteen months and concretized the aims and philosophy of youth ministry in a document called *A Vision of Youth Ministry.* It has served to guide the church's mission to young people ever since. *A Vision of Youth Ministry* affirmed the growth that had taken place in youth ministry and challenged the whole church to renew itself.

The document clearly places youth ministry within the framework of the mission and ministry of the church. It defines youth ministry as the "response of the Christian community to the needs of young people, and the sharing of the unique gifts of youth with the larger community."[1] This reciprocal relationship helps the community to view youth ministry as part of the entire ministry of the community, not separate from it—a problem often encountered when a ministry with young people is perceived as a club or an organization set apart from the mainstream of church life. *A Vision of Youth Ministry* makes clear that an effective ministry with young people incorporates them into the life of the community, where they can share their gifts and talents with the whole community. If young people are to have positive experiences of church life, they must have opportunities to be involved in the whole life of the community. Such opportunities for this type of interaction are at the heart of youth ministry, not on the periphery. By being involved in church life with adults, young people gain a view of what it means to be an adult Catholic Christian. This is a special gift of adults to young people.

The categories of youth ministry as outlined in *A Vision of Youth Ministry* closely parallel the fundamental ministries of the church: word, worship and celebrating, creating community, and service and healing.[2] The seven categories of youth ministry describe the forms that this ministry should take. It is a common framework for a holistic ministry with young people. Briefly, the seven components of youth ministry are as follows:[3]

Word: proclaiming the Good News that leads young people to faith in Jesus (evangelization) and deepening young people's faith in Jesus and applying that faith to their everyday life (catechesis)

Worship: celebrating relationships in community and with the Lord through a variety of worship experiences, personal prayer, and spiritual development

Creating community: building relationships with young people and creating a healthy environment for growth, in which young people can experience acceptance, belonging, and participation

Guidance and healing: responding to young people's need for spiritual, moral, and personal counseling; vocational guidance; and reconciliation with self, others (peers and family), and God

Justice and service: educating young people to the demands of justice and the social problems of our world, responding to young people who suffer injustice, and motivating young people for service on behalf of others

Enablement: calling forth adults and young people to become ministers and providing them with the understanding and skills needed for effective ministry

Advocacy: working on behalf of young people, interpreting their concerns and needs, and standing up for them in the Christian, and larger, community

Youth ministry has experienced a renewal within the U.S. Catholic church. A renewed ministry with young people brings a need for new and better resources to assist leaders. Before turning to the resources found in this book, let's examine the place of creative social and learning strategies within youth ministry.

Creative Strategies for Youth Ministry

We have already seen the primacy of relationships in youth ministry. However, as relationships grow and programs are created, strategies are needed to accomplish youth ministry's tasks. The strategies in this book are aids. Their aim is to provide you with a variety of activities you can use in any number of programs. Some of these strategies are primarily suited for one or another component of youth ministry. However, most are adaptable to any number of components. All these strategies foster a particular type of learning—experiential learning. To understand its contribution to your youth ministry, let's examine experiential learning.

Experiential Learning

We have often heard it said that we learn from experience. This is true to an extent. But so much of our own life experience goes by without our ever learning from it. If young people's life experiences are to be sources of learning and growth, then young people must reflect upon and assimilate them. This often goes undone because no one takes time to help them reflect upon and learn from those experiences. In addition to life experience, there is a second source of experiential learning: structured experience. Experiences we develop that engage young people in the learning process and enable them to reflect are a rich resource for learning.

The structured experiences found in the Creative Resources series—communication games, learning strategies, simulations, projects, case studies, planning ideas, crowd-breakers, mixers, games, special events, and skits—are potential learning experiences for young people.

Creative Gaming

Creative games can serve many purposes in youth ministry. They can acquaint people with one another, build trust, encourage spontaneity, mix and blend groups, and help people release energy. At the same time, they can be fun and learning experiences. Through creative games we discover an opportunity to play *with* instead of *against* one another, thus allowing us to play as a unit and reach a common goal. This type of play lets us learn from and laugh at our mistakes, instead of hiding them away in embarrassment. Creative games enhance the growth of a group and create a feeling of accomplishment among the participants, while providing an enjoyable experience for them.

Cooperative Versus Competitive Games

For many years, competition-winning has been the name of the game in our society. All our organized sports are competitive, sometimes violently so. We encourage good sportsmanship and working together as a team, but the goal is always "Beat the other team, as badly and as hard as possible." It sometimes appears that the biggest and the best players actively compete while the meek and the mild people take their places in the stands, cheering for the physical prowess of those who are "better" than they. Competition can foster an "I am a winner" or "I am a loser" self-concept in people.

Many young people suffer from a poor self-concept. "I am too short to play basketball," "I am too heavy to run track," or "They only like me because I can make fifteen points a game" are statements we often hear from young people. "Winners" and "losers" alike may be scarred by such stereotyped images of themselves. How many adults do we know who still hold on to their childhood dream of being a pitcher in a World Series game or a quarterback in the Super Bowl? Those dreams will most likely never come true for them because they "just aren't good enough." At least that is what they believe after numerous "failures" on the field at the hands of those who are a little faster, can jump a little higher, or are more agile. Just as many adults do, many young people dream of someday "making it" and harbor an image of themselves as inadequate.

There are appropriate times and places for competitive games of basketball or volleyball, but these games may not be suitable for a break at a retreat. They may be inconsistent with the message and the values we are trying to communicate to young people.

Competitive sports can, and often do, alienate some people who might otherwise participate in group activities. Competitive games are difficult for some people and are often segregating. We see boys playing on one field and girls playing on the other. Sexism in recreation can be a divisive factor in the broad set of values we try to communicate.

For the most part, the games in this book are cooperative in character.

Principles for Cooperative Gaming

1. Games are an effective educational tool. The primary purpose of games and play is to have fun. However, we do learn during play. We learn what is and what is not acceptable behavior, for example. When young people take part in a sport, they also watch the spectators. Their observations may tell them that certain language or actions are appropriate or that others are inappropriate and may even warrant penalties. In cooperative sports, young people learn how to work as a unit, how to cooperate with one another to achieve a desired goal.

Creative sports teach us new and exciting things about ourselves and others. We learn the advantages of working together instead of trying always to win. We learn the place of healthy competition by working together. Putting competition in its proper perspective becomes an insightful experience. Cooperative games teach us skills and encourage leadership, and they enable us to grow while learning.

2. Games are an extension of the values we communicate. In cooperative gaming, we remove the element of competition and replace it with the value of working together. If caring and sharing are values we are trying to communicate to young people, then a cooperative game allows those values to be lived out even in play. There is no competing, no trying out for teams, no choosing of captains; no one is left out. No one is more important than anyone else because everyone is a vital part of the unit.

If we are trying to build community with young people but encourage competitive sports during recreation time, we contradict ourselves immediately. Cooperative games are an extension of our values: we respect each person, we work together, we have fun, and no one gets hurt.

3. Cooperative games build community and help us minister to one another. Cooperative games build a sense of community among participants. By working together and tapping one another's gifts and strengths, people discover new relationships.

Ministry happens during playtime: We encourage one another, work together, laugh, struggle, and ultimately succeed *together*. Often, the people who are ministered to during cooperative sports are those who have been left to sit in the stands before because "they weren't good enough to play." The "stars" are also ministered to because they don't feel the pressure of having to produce "points." They can play, cooperate, enjoy, be encouraged, and struggle along with the group.

4. Cooperative games encourage leadership. In cooperative play, no one is *appointed* leader because he or she is stronger, bigger, or brighter. Leadership is granted by the group, at the pace of the group, and when the need is recognized by the members. Leadership emerges by consensus, and it often develops nonverbally. Cooperative recreation encourages leadership and allows it to grow and be fostered by the group members. There is perhaps nothing more exciting to

watch than the dynamics of interaction in cooperative games as young people try to conquer the obstacle at hand—and experience delight in their accomplishment. Cooperative play opens up the exciting possibilities of working as a unit, getting along, and complementing one another, as well as having fun.

5. Cooperative gaming allows the development of skills. Many people playing cooperative games have a difficult time until someone says, "I don't feel we are listening to one another. If we talk one at a time and listen, we will be able to figure this out more quickly." As the group discovers more effective means of communicating, it develops a sense of problem solving and decision-making, skills that are important to growth.

6. Cooperative games allow everyone to feel a sense of importance and accomplishment. Cooperative games allow everyone to play and work together. People are not left out because they are too short, too fat, too slow, or the "wrong" sex. Everyone is given the opportunity to feel accepted and needed instead of fearing rejection or the pressure of having to prove something to the group. *Everyone* is included in the activity. Everyone is an important part of the group and is needed by all because of the variety of experiences, personal strengths, gifts, and talents each person brings.

Guidelines for Creative Gaming

1. Always encourage and affirm the participants during games.
2. Model the Christian behavior you are expecting or hoping for from the participants.
3. Avoid games that are sexist, that is, games that assume and promote sexual stereotypes or that use sexist language.
4. Play games that challenge participants to grow, but do not choose games that frustrate the players by their difficulty.
5. Be prepared—have all equipment on hand.
6. Play only games that you personally have "field-tested."
7. Play games that help create a relaxing, comfortable atmosphere; that build community; and that avoid liable risk of bodily harm.
8. Avoid games that misuse things (such as food), waste or harm natural resources, or damage clothing, carpeting, and so on.
9. Clearly explain the object and the rules of a game before beginning (except, of course, in games that require an element of surprise).

Notes

1. United States Catholic Conference (USCC), *A Vision of Youth Ministry* (Washington, DC: USCC, Department of Education, 1976), p. 4.
2. For a contemporary description of the fundamental ministries of the church, see James Dunning, "About Ministry: Sharing Our Gifts," *PACE* 8 (1977) and *PACE* 9 (1978).
3. USCC, *A Vision of Youth Ministry,* p. 7.

Crowd-Breakers

Introduction

The games in this part are intended primarily as initial get-acquainted activities, either for groups in which most of the people are strangers to one another or for groups where smaller groups or cliques know each other pretty well but are not comfortably acquainted with other individuals or cliques. Most of these games also have the effect of relieving nervous energy and putting young people at ease in an unfamiliar environment.

Search Me

For this crowd-breaker, give each person a sheet of paper, a pencil, and an envelope containing a small object such as a rubber band, a paper clip, a bread wrapper tie, a soda pop can tab, a nail, a piece of string, and so on. Ideally, each person should be given a different object, but duplicates are okay.

Next, explain that when you turn off the lights, each player is to place the object somewhere on himself or herself so that it is *visible* yet inconspicuous. Turn off the lights for about a minute.

When you turn on the lights, have the participants move around the room and visually search each person for his or her object. Caution them to use only their eyes for their search. Explain that when they discover an object on someone, they should write down that person's name and the object. Announce a time limit (this will depend on the number of participants, but make it challenging). The winner is the one who finds the most objects and lists each one with the right person's name.

Abbreviated Phrases

Here is a challenging quiz that can be photocopied and passed out to your group. It can be done individually or in teams—with the young people pooling their brainpower to come up with the correct answers. Each abbreviated phrase contains letters that represent words and a number that gives meaning to the phrase. (Clue: In most cases, **the number is the primary clue for figuring out the phrase.**) Set a time limit; ten minutes should be long enough.

Answers
 1. 10 Years in a Decade
 2. 666: The Mark of the Beast
 3. 7 Wonders of the World
 4. 54 Cards in a Deck with Two Jokers
 5. 60 Seconds in a Minute
 6. 26 Letters in the Alphabet
 7. 99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall
 8. 52 Weeks in a Year
 9. 11 Players on a Football Team (in Canada, 12)
10. 4 Quarters in a Dollar (or 4 Queens in a Deck)
11. 3 Men in a Tub
12. 12 Apostles of Jesus
13. Rise and Fall of the 3rd Reich
14. 10 Commandments Given to Moses
15. 40 Years in the Wilderness
16. 73 Books in the Bible
17. 31 Flavors at Baskin–Robbins
18. 5 Smooth Stones in a Slingshot
19. 12 Months in a Year

Abbreviated Phrases

1. 10 Y. in a D. _____

2. 666: The M. of the B. _____

3. 7 W. of the W. _____

4. 54 C. in a D. with T. J. _____

5. 60 S. in a M. _____

6. 26 L. in the A. _____

7. 99 B. of B. on the W. _____

8. 52 W. in a Y. _____

9. 11 P. on a F. T. _____

10. 4 Q. in a D. _____

11. 3 M. in a T. _____

12. 12 A. of J. _____

13. R. and F. of the 3rd R. _____

14. 10 C. Given to M. _____

15. 40 Y. in the W. _____

16. 73 B. in the B. _____

17. 31 F. at B.–R. _____

18. 5 Smooth S. in a S. _____

19. 12 M. in a Y. _____

Bob Bob Bob

Here is a fun way to learn everyone's first name quickly. Stand in the center of the room and ask everyone to be seated in a circle or to scatter casually around the room. Move around the group randomly pointing at different people. As you point at a particular person, encourage the rest of the group to chant that person's name over and over again loudly and in rhythm, for example, "Bob! Bob! Bob! . . ."

Keep the activity going at a rapid clip. Point to everyone and keep the group chanting as loudly as possible. Encourage the group to clap in time. Point to some people more than once, point quickly back and forth between two people, and so on. It is a simple idea, but it's really wild and a great activity for learning names.

How Embarrassing!

Give everyone a sheet of paper and a pencil. Have them take a couple of minutes to write down their most embarrassing moment. Caution them to conceal their identity, to write only the truth, and to write something that they are willing to reveal to the group.

Collect the papers and read the stories to the group one at a time. After reading each one, ask the young people to guess the identity of the writer. To settle on the most likely writer, call for a show of hands. Afterward, the actual writer can reveal his or her identity. It's good for a lot of laughs, and it's an excellent way to break the ice at an informal small-group gathering.

You can substitute "my most embarrassing moment" with other ideas, like "Few people realize that I . . ." or "Ten years from now, I will be . . ."

Sum Fun

Divide the group into teams of two or more and give each team a copy of the "Sum Fun" page. Direct the team members to pool their knowledge and enter the correct number by each clue. Then have the teams add up the numbers and report their total. The team that first gets a correct total wins. Pocket calculators can be provided to make the addition a little easier, or outlawed to make it a little tougher.

Answers

1. 26	**9.** 90	**17.** 1,000
2. 7	**10.** 8	**18.** 29
3. 12	**11.** 4	**19.** 64
4. 54	**12.** 24	**20.** 40
5. 9	**13.** 1	**21.** 20,000
6. 88	**14.** 5 (or 9)	**22.** 5
7. 13	**15.** 57	**23.** 9
8. 18	**16.** 11 (in Canada, 12)	

Total: 21,574 (or 21,579 or 21,578 or 21,575)