

Teens Cycle Two-Shift Eleven

(Re)Launch Groups & *Cross the Gap* Gatherings

Primary Objective

Prepare your small groups (Sunday School classes) for the new year by enlisting leaders, reorganizing, and launching new groups.

Secondary Objective

Prepare your sixth, ninth, and twelfth grade students for the transitions they will face in the coming year.

How This Can Help You Reach Teens

Giving targeted attention to your small groups like Sunday School or by whatever name your church assigns to them is important as you approach the new school year. Re-organizing, enlisting and training leaders, promoting, and launching new groups can all increase the probability that new students can be reached and disciplined. The sixth, ninth, and twelfth grades can be very challenging, but by conducting a “cross the gap gatherings” your church will be better able to reach and keep those groups. It is especially important that you assist high school seniors in preparing for the transition to post high school life. The time frame in which the largest percentage of teens who grow up in church are inclined to stray is in the year following high school graduation. Be intentional in keeping teens connected and you will, in turn, reach more teens in the future.

Suggested Strategy

The beginning of the school year is a natural window of time to re-organize your existing groups or classes and is also a great time to start new groups. Sunday morning groups like Sunday School, as well as weekday groups, need to be evaluated and improved annually.

The first step is to determine how many groups your church needs. Do not simply organize based on who and how many attend, but rather on who and how many you desire to reach. Make a list of all current attendees and potential attendees. You need a class or group for every 22-25 that you can identify. After determining the number of groups, then assign a general age grouping to each group based on grade attended. You will also want to consider whether the groups should be co-ed or gender specific. You can also do a blend with gender specific middle school groups and co-ed high school groups. The larger your attendance, the more options you have.

The second step is to enlist and re-enlist leaders for the groups. You will need at least two adults (and preferably three) assigned to lead each group. The place to start is with prayer! Have your church and leaders praying specifically for the leaders for these groups. Re-enlist as many of the current leaders as possible. It is also important to bring on new leaders each and every year. After God reveals prospective new leaders to enlist, go to them personally and share with them

the process you have been through and express that God has laid them on your heart as an excellent candidate to lead a group. Public announcements are the worst way to conduct enlistment. While this approach is more intensive, it is also more effective. When any person agrees to serve, be sure to provide the resources needed, as well as the training. The Georgia Baptist Mission Board has lots of resources and training opportunities available.

The final step in launching or re-launching the groups is promotion. Do not just expect it to happen, relying on what has been done in the past. Spend as much time promoting the groups to teens and families as you have spent in getting to this point. The best method is still a personal face-to-face invitation. Encourage the new leaders to make face-to-face contacts with everyone on their list of attendees and prospects by any means possible. Phone calls, sending cards through the U.S. mail, emails, texting, and using social media should all be utilized. Ideally, this should be taking place for about 30 days preceding the launch or re-launch of the groups.

Ideas

Special attention needs to be given to the rising sixth, ninth, and twelfth graders, as well as graduating seniors. These transition years are when your students are most vulnerable to dropping out; but they are also opportunities to reach and minister to students, since big changes are taking place in their lives. Planning and conducting a “Cross the Gap Gathering” for these groups best occurs prior to the start of the school year. It is important that you are strategic; and that you gather with the groups to personally encourage and equip them for the transitions they are facing, whether done at the end of the school year, the beginning of the school year, or both. Churches that are intentional about helping with the transitions keep more of their students and tend to reach more as well.

For the rising sixth graders, plan the event and promote with their parents, as well as with the students. Feel free to invite those students in the seventh and eighth grades, as well as all the leaders. Plan some fun and games that are not competitive, but rather allow everyone to get to know each other better. It is always a good idea to have food (and lots of it) for middle schoolers!

For the rising ninth graders, plan something a little more personal. Instead of a group gathering, why not plan an opportunity for them to team up with another high schooler that will serve as their mentor the first six months of high school? You will need to get your high schoolers to agree, as well as give them basic guidelines; and always remember to match genders for the mentoring relationships.

For the graduating high school seniors, you will want to make this one a party! They have achieved a great goal and they need to be congratulated. A weekend retreat is a great way to recognize their accomplishment, and at the same time introduce them to the young adult ministry of your church. Invite the members of the college-age ministry to the weekend retreat. Another idea is to invite one of the many state missionaries serving on college campus nearest you to serve as the Bible study leader for the retreat. Remember that their greatest vulnerability is the six months following graduation. Let them know that is the case and give them the tools to cross the faith bridge, as well as skills for finding a new church when and if they move away.

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