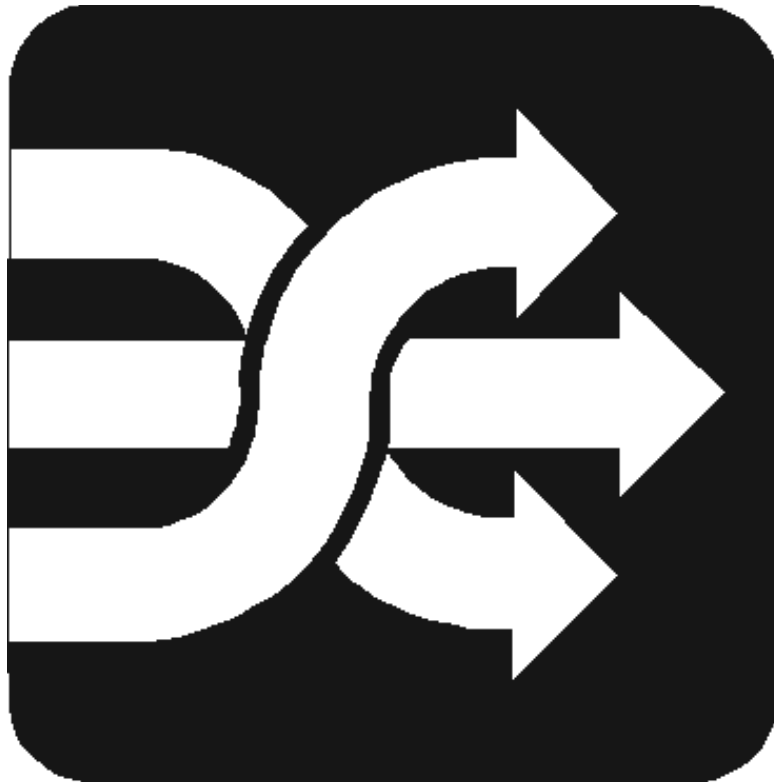




## **London Baptist Association Guide**



# **Vision and strategy for youthwork in the local church**

## **Introduction**

Welcome to the LBA's guide to *vision and strategy for youthwork in the local church*.

This guide is intended for London's Baptist Churches. It is for ministers, youth leaders, deacons, and anyone concerned with youthwork\*

This is an exciting and challenging time for the church. Statistics for the UK continue to show the decline in numbers of young people in our churches. Yet at the same time there are many exciting things happening among young people, and creative experiments to reach and keep teenagers. This is not the time to shrink back, but to move forward! This booklet is designed to help us think through some of the foundational questions about the *how* and *why* of working with young people. (Here young people are defined as those **aged 11-18**, as opposed to children, although comment on children's and young adult work will naturally be included).

This guide is only a simple introduction – but hopefully will point you in the right direction and provide you with information as to where to go should you need further guidance



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\* Note that the terms *youthwork* and *youth ministry* are used interchangeably in this booklet. Some like to make a difference, others don't. Danny Brierly has written on this issue – see his book *Joined up*

## **Asking the difficult questions**

Thinking about issues of strategy and vision has to start with asking questions. It would be very easy to give a model vision – complete with mission statement and programme ideas, and yet chances are such an approach would lead to little fruit!

So here are some key questions:

- *Why is my church working with young people?*
- *Does every church need a youthwork?*
- *Does youthwork=youth group?*
- *What are we trying to achieve with young people?*
- *What is youthwork?*
- *Is there any role for the Bible & theology in this process?*

Often youth leaders and ministers want something that will bring young people in to the church, or stop the ones we've got from leaving. These are valid concerns. But youthwork, like many areas of church life is something that we rarely stop to question.

If we want to begin to work effectively with young people then we need ask the difficult questions.

### ***To think about:***

- *When was the last time you asked “why are we doing this” about youthwork in your church?*
- *DO the church leaders believe deeply in youth ministry? Is this value reflected in your church's budget?*
- *What drives the youthwork in your church – a thought out strategy or is it just because that's what has always happened?*
- *How about other areas of church life- could there be other areas that we need to ask questions of?*

## **Why youthwork?**

There are many good and valid answers to the question “why youthwork”.

Part of the answer is found in the desire to pass on the faith to the next generation, rooted in texts such as Psalm 145:4

*One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts (NIV)*

Another answer might focus on adolescence as a period of forming values and identity – therefore a key period for people to learn about Christian belief and ideals. Historically teenage years are a time when many people come to faith. A figure from the USA suggests three-quarters of those who come to be followers of Jesus make the decision to do so before they are 18!<sup>1</sup> That may be overstating the case, but never the less it can be a key age.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Hutchcraft *The battle for a Generation* p5, in McDowell (ed) *Youth Ministry Handbook* (Zondervan 2000)

For some the answer is simply “because there are young people in my church”. For others there is an evangelistic edge to any answer to that question, focusing on the fact that countless teenagers in the UK know little of the gospel message.

A survey of LBA churches carried out in 2000 found evangelism and discipleship were the two most popular answers given to the question of the purpose of youthwork. Other answers included “providing a safe environment”, “building relationships”, “integrating young people in to the church”, “showing God’s love”.

One approach to the purpose of youthwork might be to ask ***what are we trying to achieve in working with young people? What are our desired outcomes? What do we want our young people to be like 5 years from now?***

### **Youthwork, ministry and the Bible**

As Christians a good place to find answers is the Bible.

Unfortunately, youthwork as we know it today wasn’t really a feature of life in the ancient world. “Youth leader” is not listed in the lists of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians. Acts tells of no stories of Peter or Paul opening up the church hall for ping-pong or pool tournaments.

And yet there are things we can learn from Scripture about God’s dealing with young people, ministry, and why youthwork might be important.

We have already mentioned texts such as Psalm 145 which speak of handing on faith from generation to generation. Other foundational texts for youthwork might include the Great Commission (Matt 28v19), and similar verses which call us to make known the Gospel and hold out the hope we have. Others may see verses about the Church, such as Paul’s use of body imagery (1 Corinthians 12) as speaking to youthwork.

One thing the Bible is full of is incidents of God using people of all ages – even the very old and very young who can so easily be overlooked in our world and our churches today. One author reminds us:

“Young people – impetuous, inexperienced, improbable choices by all accounts – figure prominently among Gods ‘chosen’ in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament”<sup>2</sup>. Stories such as David and Goliath, the call of Jeremiah, Samuel hearing God’s voice in the night and even the role of Mary in the Christmas story show us this, never mind that the 12 disciples were probably youths by today’s standards!

One Biblical theme that many youthwork writers have picked up on in recent times as a fundamental value or reason for youthwork is that of *incarnation*. Mark Senter suggests that “youth ministry begins when a Christian adult finds a comfortable method of entering a student’s [young person’s] world”<sup>3</sup>. This has echoes of John 1 where we read of Jesus taking on flesh and blood and entering in to our world (“moving in to the neighbourhood” as the Message

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<sup>2</sup> K. Creasy Dean & R. Foster *The God Bearing Life* (Upper Room Books, 1998)

<sup>3</sup> M. Senter III “Axioms of youth ministry” in M.

Senter III & W. Benson *Complete Book of Youth Ministry* (Moody Press, 1987)

translates it).

What this means for youth work, and our strategy and vision - is that the emphasis is put away from programme and on to relationship. Any youthwork we do should be focused on building relationships, on entering the world of young people and connecting with them in order to show them Jesus and the love of God.

Writing in an Anglican setting in New Zealand, John and Bonnie Heberton suggest "youth ministry is relational and Incarnational and communal". For them incarnation means "it take seriously the whole person...it takes seriously the contexts in which young people live"<sup>4</sup>.

Others have looked at Scripture and identified key purposes for any ministry and applied this to youthwork. This is the approach of Saddleback church in the USA, who have found 5 underlying aspects that underpin the "purpose driven church" or "purpose driven youth ministry"<sup>5</sup>. These are: Evangelism, Worship, Fellowship, Discipleship, and Ministry. The idea is that all programmes relate to these purposes, they are the foundational layer of the strategy.

When we think of strategy and vision for youthwork and the purpose of youthwork we need to listen to Scripture and hear what the Spirit is saying. That may mean looking afresh at our current ways of working.

***To think about:***

- *How does your theology (what you believe about God and the gospel) affect your work with young people?*
- *What parts of the Bible inspire you? Is there anything in Scripture that encourages you to work with young people?*
- *How do we apply material written 2000 and more years ago to our churches and situations today?*



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<sup>4</sup> [www.bopyouth.anglican.org.nz/knowning%20god.htm](http://www.bopyouth.anglican.org.nz/knowning%20god.htm)

<sup>5</sup> D. Fields *Purpose driven Youth Ministry* (Zondervan, 1998)

## **Defining the purpose of youthwork in the church: Mission Statements**

Having asked some of difficult questions, and reflected theologically (by looking at what the Bible says), the next practical step in helping develop a strategy for youth ministry could be to think about a mission statement.

What is it that you are about? What is God calling you to – as a church and with young people?

“A good mission statement should briefly summarise your aims. It should be specific but at the same time allow room for flexibility”<sup>6</sup>.

It is vital that whatever aims are summed up in the mission statement are owned by the whole church and fit in with the church’s vision. Generally a mission statement can be expanded or built on into a vision for each area of church life.

### ***Examples:***

We exist to turn irreligious high school students into fully devoted followers of Christ - *Willow Creek Church Student Impact*

*Enabling young people to discover and develop real faith in as real world – Back to Reality, Ealing*

*To know Christ and make him known – lots of churches!!*

*To present everyone mature in Christ*

*To provide an opportunity for young people to learn and grown in faith*

*To reach out to the young people who live in our area*

The examples above tell you little about what the programme is or the actual work being done. They are, however, good “yard sticks” by which to measure “results”. For example –if your church exists “to know Christ and make Him known” – can a skateboarding youth ministry fit in? What about Boys Brigade? What about an open youthwork? The answer to all those could be yes and no! A skate project might be a great way to meet young people and share Jesus with them. It might also be a waste of resources and a distraction.

Mission statements are the “bottom line “answer to the question “why are we doing this?”. They are changeable – but generally not very often.

### ***To think about:***

- *Does your church have a mission statement? Does it need one?*
- *Does your youthwork have a mission statement or have you applied your churches to this context*

## **Moving on: from statements to action**

Having spent some time on the “why”, the next task is to think about the “how” and the “what”.

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<sup>6</sup> J. Buckeridge *Youthwork Handbook* (Kingsway, 1996)

Before rushing in to thinking about programme or ideas for youthwork, it can be helpful to do some research. (Some would argue that this should come before the mission statement).

Youthwork Magazine's John Buckeridge counsels us to put "evaluation before action"<sup>7</sup>. These are wise words! Many churches rush in to putting on events or opening a youth club without research –and sadly have ended up with no-one coming, the building being wrecked or a lot of wasted time and money.

The first thing to decide, based on your mission statement, is the focus of the work. Where should you start? Do you want to build up any young people you have in your church and empower them to reach out? Or do you want to reach out to their friends and young people on the "fringe" of your church? Or to go to those completely "unchurched"? Each of these areas can sometimes need different skills. Pete Ward suggests that these are different "disciplines" of youth ministry<sup>8</sup>

The answer to the question of what to do may be obvious to you, or it may take some research to find out where best to begin. Key questions could include:

- ◇ *What else is there for young people in this area?*
- ◇ *Are there young people in this area?*
- ◇ *What are other churches doing?*
- ◇ *What resources do we have – buildings, people, finances?*
- ◇ *Where can we get help and support?*

While it's good to dream and have a big vision, it is also important to be realistic. Start where you are. The start of a youthwork might simply be to love and support the young people who are part of your church already, and encourage them to grow as followers of Jesus, rather than setting up a grand event. Learning from others is also important, but comparison is rarely healthy! Do what you can, a small church is valid and often what is needed in many situations – so don't try and do everything bigger churches do (and the same goes the other way). But do think about why you are doing what you are doing and be open to God's leading.

***Talking point: Does every church need to have a youthwork?***

It may be that after thinking and praying the issues through that you are faced with this question

It seems that sometimes we can get confused and see church as a very static thing which is organised in a certain way!

If there are young people as part of your church then you have the opportunity for youthwork. The key is to learn to love and support those young people – even if you do not run a specific group or activity for them. Help them "own" what happens and feel it is their church.

If you do not have young people in your church then you need to decide what to do. It may be that God is calling you to start a work with young people outside the church. It could also be that you could support another ministry that is working with young people in your area (such as a YFC centre). It is, however,

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<sup>7</sup> J. Buckeridge *Youthwork Handbook* (Kingsway, 1996)

<sup>8</sup> P. Ward *Youthwork and the mission of God* (SPCK, 1997)

OK to not have youthwork in your church. It is a myth to suggest that without young people your church will die out. Focus on what you can do and begin to engage in mission - reaching out - and if you reach people in their 50's then that is a blessing! Equally if you reach families and begin to get teenagers in then that is the time to engage in youthwork.

- *What do you think? Does every church need youthwork?*
- *How is your church engaged in mission?*
- *Do young people feel part of your church or on the “margins”?*



### **Moving forward: Foundational Issues**

If you are going to work in any way with young people (and children) then there are some foundational issues to look at.

#### **Child Protection**

The Baptist Union has published *Safe to Grow* which is a book with guidelines and sample policies for child protection. It is vital that your church has a child protection policy.

Child protection is all about working in a safe way with young people, minimising risk of abuse or accusation, and having clear steps to follow should an allegation of abuse be made. As part of this it is also important that people who work with young people are “safe”. To that end children’s and youth leaders should be checked with references provided, and ideally a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check should be carried out. More information on this can be found in *Safe to Grow* (available from the Baptist Union).

#### **Health and Safety**

It is also important to ensure that the environment that any work with young people is carried out in is safe. Awareness of any issues that might affect either the leaders or the young people’s health and safety is vital, along with taking appropriate action.

A related issue is that of **security**, of workers, young people and property. These issues are especially relevant if you are working with young people from outside the church family (in an open youth club etc.). A lawsuit is the last thing you need!

### **Finance**

Before embarking on specific planning it is worth knowing what budget is available (if any). While this has been mentioned earlier (see above) in terms of working out what resources are available, it is worth mentioning again here, as this can sometimes be a tricky issue. It can be helpful to know what budget is available for youthwork and who controls it. As you plan you may then decide to seek or raise specific funding.

Youthwork needn't cost anything – but equally it may cost a lot depending on the work you decide to engage with.

Formation of budget is often done on a yearly basis, and therefore, goes hand in hand with thinking out goals and plans on an annual basis.

These issues may seem “fiddly” and irrelevant to gospel ministry – but these things need to form part of the planning for any work with young people.

### **Moving forward (2): planning**

From here the next thing is to plan the specifics and set short term visions and goals.

Questions to consider at this stage are about the specifics of the programme – for example for a youth club: which activities for which weeks, or for a cell group: what curriculum or studies will you use?

This may be a good time to visit a Christian bookstore, surf the web or find out more about what other groups and churches are doing!

As well as these practical questions it can be good to have an idea of what you are aiming for.

Short term aims will vary according to your exact work but could be:

- ◇ *Summer term: To open the youth club and get 10 members*
- ◇ *To see 5 young people grow in faith and demonstrate that by baptism*
- ◇ *Autumn term: to build significant relationships with 5 unchurched young people*
- ◇ *May – June: To see open prayer become a regular feature of our youth group*
- ◇ *To challenge Bill's attitude to girls*
- ◇ *To see that group grow deeper in their love for God*

These aims could be more or less specific depending on your circumstances. Obviously we do not want youth work to become “unreal” or based on a formula. Neither do we want nor are we able, to control the work of the Holy Spirit. Often, however, it is helpful to plan and be deliberate in what we are doing. Some secular youth works encourage each worker to bring an “agenda” to each session (meeting with the youth); so that work is not just left to chance and relationships can be deliberately built up.

### **Go for it!**

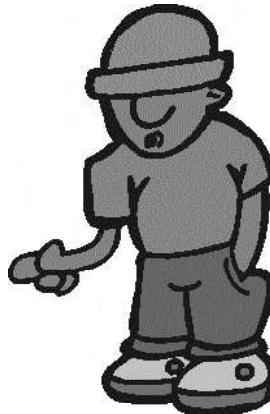
The aim of this paper is not to make youthwork more of a chore than it needs to be! It is, rather, born of the observation that many churches appear to not have a strategy and vision for their youthwork. Where things are working then that is not a problem, but often a time comes when these issues need to be faced. If we get in the habit of asking the hard questions and assessing what we do then we can become more effective!

It is also worth stating that involving young people in all of these processes is to be encouraged!

### **The missing ingredient!**

The one thing that has not been mentioned in all this talk of planning and strategy is the most vital: **PRAYER!**

It is essential that this underpins all that happens. Our vision and agenda need to be set by the Father, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The best planning in the world will do little more than produce “nice” work, or even fail miserably if God is not in it. If we want youthwork that makes disciples of Jesus and sees lives transformed then we need to be on our knees - praying before, during and after our work with young people.



## Resources

### Books

For a more complete set of recommended books – see Youthwork Magazine's *Youth Ministry Book Supplement* – available from Youthwork Magazine - [www.youthwork.co.uk](http://www.youthwork.co.uk). Most of these can be obtained from local Christian book stores – or try [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk). Youth Specialties publications are distributed in the UK by YFC.

### Youth work theory/theology – general

(in a rough order – starting with the most accessible – in my view!)

D. Fields *Help I'm a volunteer youth worker*, Youth Specialties, 1992

P. Ward *Youth Culture and the gospel*, Marshall Pickering, 1992

D. Field *Purpose Driven Youth ministry* Youth Specialties/Zondervan, 1998

McDowell & Willey (eds) *Youth Ministry Handbook*, Word, 2000

M.Green & C. Christian *Accompanying Church House*, 1999

P. Ward *Youthwork and the mission of God*, SPCK, 1997

D. Brierly *Joined up Authentic* (Paternoster), 2003

T. Jones *Postmodern Youth ministry* Youth Specialties/Zondervan 2001

### Discipleship

L.West & P. Hopkins *The D Factor*, Monarch 2002

K. Moser *Changing the World*, Aquila Press, 2000

G. Cray *Postmodern Culture and Youth Discipleship*, Grove Books

K.C.Dean & R. Foster *The Godbearing Life*, Upper Room Books, 1998

### Evangelism

B. McLaren *More ready than you realise*, Zondervan 2002

K. Edgecombe *Will they or won't they?*, Scripture Union, 2001

## Programme resources & Ideas

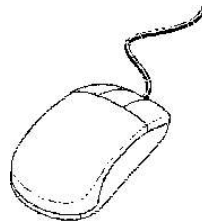
Various organisations and publishers offer programme resources and ideas – for a variety of types of youth group. Here are a few ideas:

- **Youth Specialties** – from the USA – so stuff may need some work. They offer a comprehensive range of materials for teens and leaders. Available direct, from YFC or your Christian bookstore.
- **Scripture Union** – resources focusing on primarily on teaching the Bible. Phone: 01908 856000
- **Group Publishing** – also from the USA. Another wider range of stuff – including the helpful [www.ministryandmedia.com](http://www.ministryandmedia.com), looking at taking films and videos to use in sessions
- **Churches Pastoral Aid Society (CPAS)** - Anglican based group offering a range of materials
- **Christian Focus publications** - recently started doing some youth materials
- **CPO** - printers and publisher – produce a catalogue of youth materials from a range of groups called “Sorted”. Contact direct or Pete Leveson LBA youthwork coordinator has some copies.

Other ideas:

- **Rock Solid and RS2** from YFC. Rock Solid is a club for 11-14's to attract unchurched youth. RS2 is discipleship materials for the same age range. Good stuff – but you need to subscribe so can appear costly. [www.yfc.co.uk](http://www.yfc.co.uk) or phone 0121 550 8055
- **Youth Cells** - materials available from Cell Church UK. They run regular training and information days about youth cells - small peer led youth groups. [www.cellchurch.co.uk](http://www.cellchurch.co.uk) or phone 01582 463 232
- **BMS World Mission** – produced a series of 3 resources looking at issues and giving a world perspective. Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n' roll are available from the BMS resource department.
- **Other mission agencies** – Tearfund, Christian Aid, WEC, Wycliffe all have youth departments and produce some materials.

The internet is a good place for ideas! Youthwork Magazine publishes “must see” websites. [www.lbayouth.org](http://www.lbayouth.org) has various links. Share ideas with other churches, make use of creative people, encourage young people to “own” the programme.



#### Other Resources & Information

- **Youthwork Magazine** - has been referred to already. Monthly publication with information, ideas and theory on youthwork. Also a good place to find out about camps and events.
- **Other magazines** - Sugar, J17, Mizz, Cosmo girl – all good places to find out about youth culture and the world of young people. They also have good quizzes and things to learn from and use in sessions.
- **WH Smith's Total Guide to You and Your Teenager** – aimed at parents – it's a good introduction to the world of young people.

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