

Road-trips in a Recession

Creative Ways to Fundraise and Support Local and Global Ministries on a Small Budget

It goes without saying that churches and nonprofits are feeling the stress of our nation's economic situation. Giving is more carefully calculated, and individual families are also very much feeling financially stressed from fewer hours, layoffs, and job loss.

In families affected by the recession, young people in those households typically have a very strong sense of reality and value of a dollar. Some may now be considering in-state colleges, since the college savings account isn't as good as it once was; Others have taken on part time jobs to have money for extracurricular activities. These young people are typically much more aware of what extra trips, meals, and gasoline cost than some of their peers who are not in the similar financial situations.

Some of these young people may feel very comfortable talking with their youth group about their parent being laid off and feel that is a safe and supportive space. However, when it comes to youth group activities and trips, they may not feel comfortable asking their parents for money since they are aware that the basic household bills are very much priority right now. So, how can you as their youth leader best support them and include them in activities and trips? Great question! We have included fundraiser ideas and suggestions collected from other youth leaders below.

Fun (and Effective) Fundraisers . . . Even in This Economy

As the saying goes, "Timing is everything." When choosing fundraisers, it is important to not only check the church calendar for other events but also the school calendars. For instance, if three high schools are doing their wrapping paper and candy bar sales in October, that may not be the best time to try to raise \$2000 for the youth retreat. Also, keep in mind that parents and church members are asked to support various organizations, so we don't want to bombard and overwhelm with one more thing.

Typically, having one huge fundraiser or four smaller ones seems to work well overall. In the model of having four per year, typically one well advertised and well planned one every quarter should be successful. Also keep in mind the diversity of fundraisers. For example, if the youth sell Christmas trees every December, perhaps the spring one should be something like babysitting on a Friday night for couples in the church instead of selling Easter Lilies.

Most importantly, fundraisers the youth enjoy and are invested in, for a cause they are passionate about, will be your most successful by far. Ask their opinion for fundraisers and invite them to advertise via text, Facebook, etc within their schools and extra curricular activity groups. For instance if they really want to go to a youth conference this summer, include them in figuring out what the total cost of the trip will be and include them in the creative process of fundraising.

Below are fundraiser ideas submitted as favorites and most successful from youth leaders. Feel free to use and tweak for your youth group and congregation!

- **Cake Auctions:** Various church members decorate cakes and youth host live auction to sell them. Have categories like most colorful, most tacky, most creative, etc. This is a good annual fundraiser to host on a Sunday during an all-church lunch.
- **Seasonal Sales:** Pansies, Poinsettias, Easter Lilies, Christmas Trees, Christmas Wreaths, Tulips
- **Church Wide Super Bowl Lunch:** Youth and volunteers make chili or sub sandwiches for congregation for lunch after church on Super Bowl Sunday
- **Car Washes:** In church parking lots or parking lot of a business owner in your congregation. Remember to choose a location with safe distance from the road, yet visible to those driving by.
- **General Meal Ideas:** Spaghetti Suppers, Chili Cook-Off, BBQ, Baked Potato Bar, Oktoberfest Meal, Father's Day Brunch, Subs on Super Bowl Sunday.
- **Yard Work:** Choose seasonal options like leaf raking/ blowing or grass cutting. Youth volunteer to do the work in return for payment that goes into youth trip funds.
- **Silent Auction:** Well in advance, request donations from members of your congregation and community for your silent auction. Keep in mind various dollar amounts so everyone has an opportunity to bid. For instance, if you have three beach weekends, be sure to also have some \$20 value items like lunch gift cards. For silent auction success, fantastic items and good advertising is key.
- **Dinner and a Show:** Youth and volunteers decorate the church fellowship hall/common space for an upscale three-course dinner for church members. Youth serve as hosts, servers, entertainment, etc.
- **Babysitting:** Youth and volunteers baby-sit for younger children so their parents may have a date night on a Friday or Saturday night at the church.
- **Flamingo Flocking:** Church members pay to have youth place a specified number of flamingos in another church member's yard, and the recipient church member must pay to have the youth remove said flamingo(s).
- **Sponsorship:** Ask members of your congregation who you know are financially stable and at a place in life where they may be able to make a donation to sponsor a young person for your annual mission trip, conference, or service project. The donor and the recipient may remain anonymous, but this is a simple yet powerful way to include the greater church in the ministry to young people.

Mission Doesn't Have to End With the Word "Trip"

For a local mission activity, search your local nonprofits and faith based non-profits through websites like www.npo.org, Chamber of Commerce, hospitals, etc. Ask specific questions to ensure best experience for the organization and your group. What do they really need? When do they need it most? Will they have staff to train/supervise? How many folks do they prefer come at one time?

Regardless of your budget, if your group schedule doesn't allow for many off site activities, you may wish to participate in mission activities together from your own youth room or fellowship hall. Ideas include making hygiene kits for Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, Operation Christmas Child¹, making bag lunches, etc. These can all be done assembly line style with everyone having an important role. This requires planning ahead and gathering specific items, but is a travel-free mission project. This is a great component to include in a lock-in as a unique midnight activity. Make it fun with music in the background, etc. This is also a way to recruit new volunteers who topically cannot take a week off for a mission trip, but could easily give their time on a Friday night. Additional options to do on site include 30 Hour Famine² and Souper Bowl of Caring³.

Another idea is to plan a weeklong mission trip within your city. Coordinate with local organizations to plan activities with them, then have dinner together and debrief as a group at the church each night. Plan to sleep at the church, just as you would if you were in another city being hosted by another congregation. Since it's local, volunteers may be able to commit to one day or providing dinner one night instead of taking significant amount of time off. This also keeps costs down for youth, as the fee will likely include breakfast, lunch, and gas for the church van.

Don't forget to utilize your local presbytery camp if traveling a few states away isn't in your budget this year, but your young people would like a weekend retreat off-site.

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1. www.operationchristmaschild.org
2. www.30hourfamine.org
3. www.souperbowl.org

